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AGENTS
OF
RECONCILIATION

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Books by
ARNOLD B. COME
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AGENTS OF RECONCILIATION (Revised and Enlarged Edition)
AN INTRODUCTION TO BARTH'S "DOGMATICS" FOR PREACHERS
HUMAN SPIRIT AND HOLY SPIRIT

AGENTS OF RECONCILIATION

(Revised and Enlarged Edition)

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1964

Arnold B. Come

Philadelphia

THE WESTMINSTER PRESS

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Preface

ONE of the most notable aspects of the so-called revival of religion during the last twenty-five years has been the discovery of the laity. Of course, the church has always been aware of the laity, but mainly as an object to be cared for, not as a subject who assumes major responsibility for the life and work of the church. The rise of the laity in the latter capacity is just now bringing the church to a startling and embarrassing awareness, viz., that it has never worked out a positive theological understanding of the meaning and role of the laity.

It is notable that the first comprehensive attempt (1953) to make up for this lack was by a Roman Catholic, Father Yves M. J. Congar, in his *Lay People in the Church*. Pioneering thinking on the subject among Protestants was produced by J. C. Hoekendijk of the University of Utrecht and by Hans-Ruedi Weber as Secretary of the Department on the Laity of the World Council of Churches which was established in 1956. In 1958 came Hendrik Kraemer's stimulating work *A Theology of the Laity*. And following the first edition of the present volume in 1960, there has come a veritable flood of books, articles, and conferences on the subject in America.

This new edition retains the original thrust to set the prob-

lem of the laity in the context of the place and mission of the church in the world — hence challenging the very distinction between clergy and laity. But Chapter 7 has been radically revised in order to stress the more positive aspect of the church's mission, in line with Bonhoeffer's suggestion of a Christian secularity in a world come of age. And a wholly new concluding chapter has been provided in order to do two things: first, to compel readers of this book to face up to the startling barriers that stand in the way of Christians as they seriously attempt to become "agents of reconciliation"; and secondly, to suggest that there is probably no better path to the renewal of the church in our time than through a frank consideration of these barriers by local congregations. The way through these barriers will not be handed down to the church by theologians or brainstorming committees but will finally be discovered by groups of Christians who attack these barriers with all the resources of spiritual power, theological insight, and worldly wisdom that the diverse gifts of the diverse members of the church provide. In this context the artificiality of the clergy-laity distinction will be known — and abandoned.

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THE CHURCH
AND
THE WORLD

THE Christian church today has a new self-consciousness.

The church did not seek it or ask for it. Historical events, under God, have compelled the church into self-awareness and self-appraisal. And this agony of rediscovery has not ended but only begun. By the first quarter of the twentieth century the line between church and world had been blurred almost to extinction. Everything and everybody appeared to be already Christian or about to become Christian — either by the gospel of socialism or by the gospel of conversion.

Then came the bludgeoning of this incredible naïveté by war, depression, and war again — all within one generation. The church fell, silent and dumb. The latent secularism of the age, untouched by the superficial gospels of the previous century, quietly but firmly took control of both the private soul and the public life of American man. It erupted into a militant crusade in European and Asian communism. The church and its faith in Christ seemed to have been frozen into a permanent state of archaic irrelevance.

Then out of death came new life. Suddenly, within the last decade, people have flooded into the church, without plan or promotion. People, within and without the church, are turning to the Christian faith with questions, looking for answers.

*Cultural
Xanthy*

Religious books and periodicals have become a significant factor in the publication world. Departments and courses in religion have been established in numerous state colleges. In Europe and Asia, intellectuals and laborers who have been reluctant to step inside the structures of traditional churches have responded to the invitation to form study and discussion groups *alongside* the church.

As the center of all this attention and concern, the church regained a measure of self-consciousness and self-confidence. In fact, it all too quickly concluded that things were back to normal. In its anxiety to meet the rising tide of religious concern, the church's leadership fell back upon two of the old "normal" ways of handling the masses — revivalism and a do-it-yourself method for gaining "peace of mind." It is now clear that the revivals have answered no questions, but have served mainly as religious festivals for the already convinced. And most have found that the new pills are a quicker, cheaper, and less arduous tranquilizer than the god proffered by the priests of "peace of mind." So the church finds itself today in the anomalous position of being resurrected in its body but still in search of its spirit. How is the church to understand itself, and how is the individual Christian to understand himself, as God in history has forced the community of men in Christ to a new self-awareness? If answer is to be found, it will not come as a deliverance from certain superior members of the body. The Spirit of God resides in the body as a whole, and every member of the body must enter into the church's agonizing spiritual self-appraisal if the very meaning of its existence in God's purpose for mankind is to be captured afresh in this day.

The church will know its own spirit only as it knows the world.

The Christian community always has been subject to

temptation in two opposite directions in its relation to the world: either to flee the world and to be separate from it or to embrace the world and to be absorbed by it. The church will know its true self, its nature and function, its being and calling, when it simultaneously senses its identity *from* the world, but realizes that it has been given this identity only *for* the world. The church may come again to be gripped by the Pauline conviction that Christ is the only Savior of the world and the church is his agency of reconciliation, that the church possesses the gospel of salvation and every Christian is an agent in the ministry of reconciliation. (Rom. 1:1-6, 16-17; II Cor. 5:18-20.) But the full meaning of "Christ," "gospel," "salvation," "reconciliation," and "ministry" will be grasped only as the Christian is possessed by a clear and vivid vision of that "world" which God so loved and came to reconcile to himself in Jesus Christ.

Today there is no issue on which the church is more confused than on its relation to the world. The very events of history are forcing the church to redefine this relationship, and the church is thereby being forced to redefine its own being. Three concrete examples will serve as parables of the church's dilemma.

From West Berlin a young minister depicts the bewildering and bitter end of the policy of the established church, which began when the Emperor Constantine, in A.D. 325, decreed the pagan cults to be illegal, and thereby Christianity became the official governmentally enforced religion of the Western world. In this particular German parish the church is responsible for all the people in a certain geographical area. The church belongs to the people, and the people belong to the church — by law. The church is supported by a tax collected by the Government through an income deduction. As long as anyone pays this tax, he is officially a member of the

church and has a right to the services of the church and its clergy. In this parish 90 per cent pay their tax and so are automatically baptized, confirmed, married, and buried by the church. But after confirmation only 5 per cent participate in any way in the life of the church. So, although fifteen thousand people have the right to make demands on the services of the church, only seven hundred render any service to the church and its cause — beyond the nominal tax.

At first, an American might be struck by the apparent advantage of having 90 per cent of the community involved in the life of the church. But this kind of involvement turns out to be no advantage but an actual debilitation of the life and energy of the church. It means that 95 per cent of the membership take no active part. Yet they consider themselves to be valid members, so that the other 5 per cent cannot have a sense of identity as the true church. Furthermore, the whole system and concept has encouraged such a radical clericalism that even the active 5 per cent look to the clergy as the ones who really "do the work of the church." It is little wonder that the young minister complains of a lack of responsibility and of fellowship among the laity. This very concept and system of the church's being, in relation to the world, has laicized the vast majority of Christians, that is, has turned them into second-class amateur Christians who have really no part and no responsibility in the church. The church has gained the world at the price of losing its soul.

This young minister in West Berlin reports that some of the leaders of the German church look with envy at the American churches with their highly active and responsible laymen, and they are seeking ways to set the church free, with responsible congregational leadership. But an American counterpart to the Berlin minister is not so certain that an active and responsible laity guarantees truly Christian iden-

tity and freedom for the American church. In our second parable, we find a young American pastor writing these words: "You could supplant almost any Christian church today with an institution dedicated to 'doing good,' and if you had them sing together, had 'circles' and 'potlucks,' and preached 'ideals' or 'peace of mind,' and once in a while thundered at them, you'd notice no difference in the people or the church. All you've done is left Jesus out, and he was little enough there to begin with."

This young American pastor admits he exaggerates. Yet the point is clear. There is separation of church and state, and the laity do not leave all the work and responsibility to the clergy. Yet, while being politically and financially independent, the American church is subject to another kind of enslavement to the world around it. Although free from the Government, it has so identified with American culture that it cannot call its soul its own. Although high church officials and judicatories occasionally thunder judgments on American society and state, these pronouncements are scarcely known by, let alone rooted in, the "religious" life of the bulk of church members. Their "religious" life, rather, consists in the winning of "peace of mind" by being inspired to live by those good American "ideals" which lead men to "do good" and thereby to attain "success." Jesus is the teacher and the example by which men are inspired. The disciples come to be served, not to serve.

So, like the German church, the American church also belongs to the people, not by law and custom, but by cultural identification. It is partially because of this conformation of the gospel to the desires of the people that 60 per cent of the American population is content to be enrolled in some church and to sit occasionally under the preaching of the Word. And it is the dead weight of this great mass of the

people, not legally but bodily and financially present, that fills the heart of the American pastor with despair equal to that of his German counterpart. The largest part of the frantic activism of the American congregation seems very slightly related to the reconciliation offered to men by God in Christ, and seems almost deliberately divorced from the mission for which the church was called into being. And neither the pastor nor the people are the cause for the church's loss of its spirit, its meaning. Rather, this failure is to be traced to the basic misunderstanding that has divided the body of Christ, the church, into a minority of specialists and a majority of second-class, uninformed, inept, secular "laymen."

Our third example that yields a third parable on the relation of church and world comes from East Germany, just a few miles and yet a world apart from our first example. Indeed, it exemplifies a new form of existence for the church because the church is called upon to live in a world or context wholly different from any previously experienced. In large areas of the world today the church must cope with a ruling philosophy that is openly and militantly nonreligious. In spite of the claims of some that Marxism is a Christian heresy or a new religion, the fact is that in it the Christian community encounters an essentially different kind of opposition from that of Imperial Roman polytheism, exclusivistic Mohammedanism, the primitive pagan or highly sophisticated ethnic religions of Asia and Africa, or the perverted "Teutonic Christianity" of Nazi Germany. Now organized societies accept the Christian charge that all religions are idolatries, cast the charge back into the teeth of Christianity itself, and claim the power for man to define his own meaning and to organize the universe for its realization. The church occasionally has had to deal with a few brilliant eccentric atheists but has never before had to live under a totali-

tarian regime that simply declares all religion to be irrelevant.

Our parabolic event reveals the agony of mind of a German pastor who lives under such a regime in East Germany. How is the church, how is a Christian, to live in relation to such a world as now encompasses him? Out of great perturbation and confusion of mind and spirit, he addresses his questions to one of the most profound and omniscient prophets of the Christian faith in the twentieth century, Karl Barth, the theological professor of Basel, Switzerland, who had been driven from Germany by Hitler. The pastor asks the theologian: Shall he declare loyalty to the regime; shall he secretly wish for reunion with the West with its freedom and prosperity; shall he pray for God to destroy the regime? The theologian replies: The Communist regime is God's "rod of punishment" and "useful scourge" by which the church is to be purified of complacency and compromise; pledging loyalty to an established order does not exclude "loyal opposition"; deliverance from the Communists might result in being obligated to the even more questionable ideas of Adenauer or the fleshpots of the "American way of life."

Harsh words for a prophet who rests at ease in Zion to speak to exiles who must hang their harps in the willows, forbidden to sing songs of Jerusalem (Ps. 137)! Certainly, these words ought to raise the haunting question for all Christians in the "free" world: Can the church, from within itself, break its shackles of legal establishment and cultural identification, and so attain its true identity and purpose in Christ, without the external scourging of harsh historical abrasives in the left hand of God? No glib and overly confident affirmative to this question can be taken seriously by anyone who has labored long within the church. Furthermore, we must take seriously Langmead Casserley's conten-

tion that in its own pervasive materialism America is already half Marxist itself (*The Bent World*). Perhaps capitalistic materialism is only more subtle and indirect, and therefore more insidious, in its ways of declaring religion to be irrelevant, or in twisting religion to its own ends. Under communism the enemy is at least out in the open and not hypocritically claiming to be the defender and supporter of true religion.

Nevertheless, the advice of Karl Barth to those living under totalitarian communism seems to lead to a strangely quietistic form of Christian life — strange, that is, in the light of his repeated definition of the Christian life as being nothing more than the joyful and exuberant witness and proclamation of the faith that Christ died for all, that Christ now rules over all, that Christ shall come again to receive all into his salvation. If this Christian witness cannot be made in the school, in the market place, and in the political assembly, but only in the sanctuary of the home and church, then the relation of the church and the world has not been clarified. Rather, the church has again become satisfied with a ghetto faith, and Israel has again failed to be the "light for the Gentiles."

So we have these three parables of three ways in which the church is related to the world: the church established by the law of the state, the church subjected to a culture, the church driven into a ghetto by atheistic politics. If American Christians can easily discern the loss of Christian freedom and identity in the European churches, let them be assured that European Christians can see just as clearly the cultural enslavement of the American churches, and that they consider it to be even more inimical to the cause of Christ. Surely, the whole Christian community is stirring to the realization that none of these parables contain the picture of the proper rela-

tion of the church to the world of today. But what is wrong with them?

We started this section by asserting that the church will know its own spirit only as it knows the world. How do the churches in the parables regard the world? In each case the world is considered to be either friend or foe. Or, in Karl Barth's view, the Communist state is both in that as "enemy" it is fulfilling the "friendly" service of divine scourging. In each case, therefore, the church is interested in what the world will do for or to the church. The world, under God, is conceived (Barth excepted) as designed to serve the well-being of the church, and the church as designed for the well-being of its members. The church itself is regarded as the be-all and end-all of the Christian life. Indeed, some would even declare the church to be the final repository of the Kingdom of God, the ultimate product of God's entire creative activity. But the Christian community across the earth is becoming restless under the restraint of this obviously all too narrow vision of the purpose of God and of the role of the church in that purpose. The Christian people cannot rest easy with the specter of a lost world when the gospel proclaims that God has come in Christ to save it. Nor can they rest easy with their self-image as the assured elect when their Master's life took the form of a servant, and he called them to the "way of the cross."

The present study is a sign of the growing Christian awareness that the church is not an end in itself, that the world does not exist for the church, but that *the church exists for the world*. So again: the church will know its own spirit, its own meaning and purpose, only as it knows the world. How, then, is it to know the world? Even as God in Christ knew the world. Even as God looked upon the creation of his heart, the projection of his love, not to make heedless demand for

tribute as from a worthless serf, but simply to look at his world as the world, to know man's need in compassionate concern. If the church has lost its sense of proper relation and of mission to the world, then let it summon up whatever traces of the mind and spirit of Christ still reside within it, and with his eyes look upon the world *for the world's sake*. By so losing its self (concern), the church may find its soul.

✓ What kind of world does the church behold when it disengages itself from compromising involvements and ceases to fear the world's threats to its existence?

The world is a hell of alienation.

Beneath the appearance of exuberant, confident, material well-being, contemporary Western man is a hollow shell. He works hard to expend his pent-up energies but is bemused and confused as to what to do with his accumulations of leisure and wealth. He is vaguely aware that his island of white prosperity is surrounded by a seething sea of colored destitution and degradation that is threatening to rise in a tidal wave to swallow up and obliterate his island. The new sense of social cohesiveness and togetherness is already being exposed as a sham. The hope and vision, during World War II, that man would at least return to "normal" or possibly even actualize "one world" has not risen concretely for a single instant out of the ashes of the recent holocaust of human fear and hate. Rather, man is being told that he is a "lonely crowd" (David Riesman). His dreams are nightmares of atomic destruction. The cheers for "freedom" and "ideals" sound hollow and do not carry conviction as they are cried out by those who languish in the chains of "organization man" (William H. Whyte, Jr.) and in the mire of an "affluent society" (John K. Galbraith).

The prophets of pessimism to the contrary, this dark picture is not the whole picture. Against the vulgarity and de-

praved animality of TV and movie, of night club and cocktail party, of circus sports and pleasure cruises, there stands the tremendous boom in all the arts and their appreciation, the mushrooming of evening colleges and discussion groups, the phenomenon of paperback classics sold by the thousands, the growth of humanitarian foundations established by public subscription and the heirs of the old robber barons for the meeting of basic human needs at home and abroad, for the promotion of education, the arts, and the sciences. And even discussion and action on the racial issue now goes on in a moral and spiritual context that did not obtain a generation ago.

Yet these shafts of light are notable because they flash upon and enlighten an overwhelmingly glowering and darkening horizon. And they do not point consistently and clearly to a path that leads beyond our present horizon, but they shoot out sporadically, disconnectedly and inexplicably. Although of great significance in the total scheme of things, they do not comprise the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire that lead the human race one step after another toward the Promised Land (Ex. 13:21). Contemporary man, in the medium of his arts of self-analysis and self-expression, reflects this confusion. Recent drama and novel especially, as they hold up the mirror for man's reflection, reveal scarcely a trace of nobility, but rather its stark betrayal and perversion. Although many church people still think these "dirty" plays and novels are about "other" people, many are beginning to realize that the literary artist is picturing the very world in which Christians live, and which invades and pervades not only their environment but also the inmost life of Christians and their church.

The fact that most of these dramatists, novelists, and poets do not identify themselves with the Christian faith does not

invalidate their picture of contemporary man. For the Christian, it is a partial view. It opens up for man's longing eyes no vista of the transcendent reaches of human nature into the dimension of eternity. With few exceptions, this literature sounds no note of redemption and renewal. Yet irrefutably and more powerfully than any Christian preaching and dogmatizing, this literature strips man of all the sham and hypocrisy involved in his pretended virtues and in his claims to greatness. As Jean-Baptiste Clamence, in Albert Camus's *The Fall* (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1957), says: "God is not needed to create guilt or to punish. Our fellow men suffice, aided by ourselves." By their art, some of these "fellow men" of Christians help us to see man's crime and punishment more vividly than many Christians are wont to admit. They therefore help us to see and to listen to the world for what it truly is.

One of the amazing things we find in this literature is the reappearance of an old idea that modern man was supposed to have laughed out of existence: hell. And herein it is no laughing matter. Indeed, its portrayal calls forth fear and nausea even more than the old preaching of hell-fire. This hell is no longer something future that we may yet avoid, but is a yawning abyss of corruption that opens up in the midst of our present life—within, in the hypocrisy and doubt of our inmost spirit; without, in every act of fear, hate, lust, greed, envy, and misunderstanding that shatters human society into bits. It includes that perversion of human ingenuity, the ICBM, which trembles on its launching pad, awaiting only the touch of a finger to make the inward hell an outward reality.

As the Christian community looks with the mind of Christ into the hell of this world, it should be able to discern its essential nature in terms of which this literature is only vaguely

or partially aware. Camus in *The Fall* sees mankind reduced by its egotism and hypocrisy to a hopeless mass existing in a dreamlike existence resembling the Zuider Zee: "A soggy hell! . . . space is colorless, and life is dead, . . . universal obliteration, everlasting nothingness made visible." So men finally face "the inner sea, on the drab strand. They listen to the foghorns, vainly try to make out the silhouettes of boats in the fog, then turn back over the canals and go home through the rain, chilled to the bone." Sartre, in *No Exit*, pictures man's tragic dilemma as symbolized in the incompatibility of an unthinking nymphomaniac, a vengeful Lesbian, and one male, an impotent coward, forced to live with one another, with "no exit." The play reaches its climax with the despairing cry of the coward, "Hell is other people." T. S. Eliot, in his attempt at Christian drama in *The Cocktail Party* (Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1950), reverses this assertion when Edward, the hollow-hearted socialite, cries out: "Hell is oneself, hell is alone, the other figures in it merely projections. There is nothing to escape from and nothing to escape to. One is always alone."

When the Christian looks at this world and listens to what it has to say about itself, he comes to see that it is indeed a hell. And this hell in which he lives and which invades his life is a hell of alienation. But it is something more than just an alienation of man from man, which is so visible and so tangible. Indeed, that kind is rooted and grounded in another kind of invisible alienation. Men are incapable of understanding and of having authentic relations with others, and so are condemned to the hell of isolation just because they do not understand themselves. Man is alienated or estranged from his own true self. He has failed to achieve the fulfillment of his given potentiality and his intended destiny. So, as man turns inward in search of his self, the image always

flees from his grasp and eludes him as he stumbles in despair through the fogs and bogs of his confused and disjointed inner life. Man finds himself incapable of rightly framing the question, Who are *you*? because he also cannot answer the question, Who am *I*? So, according to Eliot, the unloving are matched with the unlovable, and the result is hollowness, futility, and superficiality instead of true persons and true relationship. From this comes "a world of lunacy, violence, stupidity, greed." The best that most people can expect in such a world, Eliot claims, is to

Maintain themselves by the common routine,
Learn to avoid excessive expectation,
Become tolerant of themselves and others,
Giving and taking, in the usual actions
What there is to give and take. They do not repine;
Are contented with the morning that separates
And with the evening that brings together
For casual talk before the fire
Two people who know they do not understand each other,
Breeding children whom they do not understand
And who will never understand them.

But why are men estranged from their own true selves and alienated from each other? The Christian community, looking into the world, knows this alienation of man from his self and from each other to be rooted in still a third form of broken relationship. Because there is a still more fundamental dimension of estrangement in man's life, his world is therefore filled with brokenness, strife, disillusionment, and despair. Man is also alienated from God.

This alienation is more difficult to isolate, to illustrate, and to define. Man's relationships to himself and to others are not *things* to be seen and handled. Yet they can be pointed to with some objectivity in comparison with the attempt to give

concrete content to relationship with God. God is no glowing cloud of ideal truth that hangs above the heads of mankind, beckoning man ever onward and lightening the path before him. Nor is God a mysterious inward "cloud of unknowing" that absorbs the being of man into its own being and that can be found through some given methods of spiritual discipline. Nor is God *a person* among other persons who may be searched out and known if one just looks far enough. Indeed, it is precisely the Christian community, which claims to know God in a qualitatively unique and ultimate way, that asserts God to be indefinable. God is not to be contained or to be classified. To be known, God must be met. To possess the truth of God requires a participation in the life of God.

Hence, the Christian does not see the world's alienation from God as a conscious rebellion of man against God as an identifiable object. Rather, this alienation is discernible almost entirely in terms of its results, of the ultimate negativities of human existence in this world. The great mass of mankind appears to be submerged in hopeless and meaningless enslavement to the impersonal tyranny of the forces of nature and human society. The prostitute in his novel *The Woman of Rome* (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, Inc., 1949) is taken by Alberto Moravia as a symbol of this plight of man. She tells us that, in certain moments of reflective exhaustion and disgust: "I thought how I had come out of endless night and would soon go on into another endless darkness, and that my brief passing was marked only by absurd and trivial actions. I then understood that my distress was caused, not by what I was doing, but more profoundly by the bare fact of being alive, which was neither good nor evil but only painful and without meaning." Furthermore, she imagined that "everyone, at least once a day, must feel his own life reduced to a

single point of absurd, ineffable anguish." And this thought strengthened her belief "that all men without exception deserve to be pitied, if only because they are alive."

Alienation from God, then, manifests itself in loss of meaning, in the despair of meaninglessness. But there are men in the world who have not lost hope and whose striving for meaning reveals another dimension in man's alienation from God. There are those in every generation of every place and time who hear a call from beyond the encompassing hills and a voice from the depths of their own being. They know, though they know not how they know, still they know that they are meant, that they are given, to become *someone*, something other than just an object in the causal chain of nature's necessity. But this company of strangers and pilgrims on the earth have always been plagued by two problems: first, to determine the meaning itself; and secondly, to detect the resources for the realization of whatever meaning they can delineate. Here the Christian beholds the world plunged into the deepest despair as man perennially seeks the key and force of meaning within his own life and being. Alienation from God, therefore, is estrangement not only from the source of meaning but also from the power of meaning. Many of the great religions and philosophies and sociopolitical schemes of men must call forth admiration and even awe from Christians, even to the point where, with Calvin, they must believe that these are the evidences of the continuing work of the Spirit of God amongst estranged mankind. But in the face of such conviction, the Christian is gripped even more profoundly by the tragic sense of life as he surveys the wreckage of these systems which litters the roadways of human history. Over against this scene the Christian should become ever more intensely aware that the uniqueness of Jesus Christ does not lie in the bringing of

new schemes or new ideas but in his being the presence of the Kingdom, the power, of God himself by whom the true and ultimate meaning of this world is now to be realized.

So the world is in a despairing hell of alienation because men are fundamentally estranged from meaning and power. Men will know, out of their own created nature, that they have met God when they are encountered by ultimate meaning and infallible power. Only then can man's alienation from self and from fellow man be resolved. Until then man appears to be engaged in conflict with self and others. Indeed, the very world seems to be an enemy, and man seeks to escape from it or to conquer it, both attempts ending in failure and despair. Now, the Christian community knows that, apart from God, the world is man's enemy. But it also knows that this is God's world. The world is the only locale where man can find his meaning and destiny. Man's freedom from the world must occur in the world and must lead to freedom over the world until the world becomes his friend. In fact, the Christian knows that, in a sense, God's reclaiming of the world as his own has already occurred in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And the Kingdom or rule of God is to come on earth as it is in heaven.

This Christian view of the world must and will be explored in detail in a later chapter. But it must not be stated first in a way that lulls the Christian community into a sense of restful assurance and inactivity. The vision of the world as God's world is a vision of *faith* looking back to the Christ-event in history, and it is a vision of *hope* looking forward to his return in glory. When the community of Christ looks at the world, however, with *love*, the love of God that was in Christ, then the church must be filled and moved with compassion, for it beholds a world that is a hell of alienation.

What then, finally, is the meaning, the mission, the calling,

the very reason for the being of the church, that arises in the self-consciousness of the church as it listens and looks to the world for the world's sake and not its own? The meaning and mission of the church must match in strength and glory all the horror of the world's alienation. Over against alienation the church does not stand in fear and retreat, or in vindictive condemnation and retributive judgment. Rather, the death and despair of *alienation* are met and matched with the life and hope of *reconciliation*.

✓ / Reconciliation! This is the pleading call of the lost and lone world, which the church hears when it looks and listens with the mind and heart of Christ. And the church must know that this call is the call to the church from him who is both Lord of the church and Creator of the world.

Agents of reconciliation! This is the meaning and historical destiny of the Christian people, individually and corporately. Reconciliation: a rich word and a powerful reality that demands detailed explication but that must first be seen as the center around which must revolve the whole life and program of the church, not as some mystic interior reality around which hovers an esoteric fellowship for its own edification and enjoyment. Reconciliation in the Christian experience is the very presence of God himself in all his reality and power for the renewing and perfecting of mankind and his world. Of course, to be the *agents* of reconciliation the Christian community must know reconciliation at the heart of its own life. But if the church truly so knows God's reconciling presence in Christ Jesus, then the church will prove it by becoming his agency of reconciliation to all the world. It is to this self-understanding to which the events of the world under the providence of God are leading and coercing the church in our day.

AGENTS
OF
RECONCILIATION

THE church looks at the world out of the eyes and heart of Jesus Christ. It beholds a world in the hell of alienation. What does the church have to offer to this world?

It brings the Word and the power and the glory of *reconciliation*.

It is not the aim of this little book to explore the inner nature of man's hell and of God's salvation. Rather, assuming such knowledge, it is our purpose here to discover the role of the church in God's reconciling activity. Nevertheless, to delineate rightly the being and calling of the Christian community requires a brief but sharp depiction of both the threat of doom and the promise of resurrection that comprise the context that explains the very existence of the church. So against the background of man's degradation in estrangement, as characterized in the preceding chapter, the church must have also some consciousness of what it has to offer for the deliverance of man from his dire dilemma. In this chapter, then, we will seek to discover two things: what "reconciliation" is, and what it means to be an "agent."

Reconciliation consists of nothing short of the restoration and fulfillment of God's original and persistent purpose for his creation.

Note that there are two elements, restoration *and* fulfill-

ment. In the new life that breaks into human awareness through Jesus Christ there is, on the one hand, a sense of the dropping away of layer upon layer of corrupting, immobilizing accretions; the sense of starting afresh, of dropping back to the beginning, of going home to be a faithful child after wandering as a prodigal son. But on the other hand, in the new life in Christ there also comes an awareness of the realization of something that existed only as a possibility and a hope in original Creation. The dawning of the Kingdom of God on earth does not consist simply of a return to the Garden of Eden — as well it should not. Even in the fundamental creative act in which God shaped essential human nature there lurked that fearsome, shadowy side of innocence and freedom that, though not of necessity but out of human weakness, inevitably led to man's history of failure and tragedy. In human history, whether as a race or as an individual, all the bright promise of newborn innocence does not move in a straight line to realization but is immediately embroiled in darkness, and man moves out onto the tragic detour through the wastelands of willfulness, rebellion, isolation, ignorance, blindness, and despair. A mere return to Eden, with the inevitable turning again of this wheel of fate, would be no redemption and salvation worthy of the name.

The reconciliation in Christ, therefore, brings not only a return of man to his origins in God but also carries him on to the realization of his destiny with God. In the new life in Christ the Christian lays hold of something that he recognizes was always his but which he never had. It was meant for him by God from the beginning but was never attained. It is what man in his alienation has always been looking and longing for but in the wrong place and in the wrong way. And now that it has come, given by God and accepted by man, the dark possibilities of the perversion of human free-

dom still threaten but cannot again lead man into self-destruction. Human history no longer moves in the same futile circle because now it contains within itself that reality which moves it toward its God-appointed consummation.

The delineation of the actual reality of man's restoration and fulfillment, in God's reconciliation, has always been found to be an elusive and difficult task. God's community, which has experienced this reality, has never found one best or wholly satisfactory way of describing it. In fact, most Christians have only a dim and formless sense of the actual substance of their "Christian religious experience." If called upon to express it in words, they would find themselves embarrassed and tongue-tied. If confronted with the demand by an informed adherent of another religion to defend the Christian faith, they would retreat in confusion and uncertainty. It will be argued later that this religious inarticulateness and theological illiteracy does not completely incapacitate the Christian community from fulfilling its God-given task in the world. Nevertheless, it is certainly clear that such a lack does seriously limit the force of the church's witness; so the causes and cure of this condition will receive attention throughout. In the meantime, at least a rudimentary understanding of what God has accomplished in Christ must be articulated if any clarity at all is to be brought to the church's new self-understanding in relation to the world.

It will be instructive first of all to summarize the different ways in which the Biblical people described what it was like to experience God's reconciliation. In the first rather specific vision of God's promise and purpose, Moses hears God saying,

I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, . . . and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the

Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey. (Ex. 3:7-8.)

Five hundred years later, the vision of God's good purpose has been dramatically enlarged. Now it is seen as the day when all nations shall flow to Mt. Zion to hear God's word and to learn his ways:

And they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
 and their spears into pruning hooks;
 nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
 neither shall they learn war any more;
 but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree,
 and none shall make them afraid;
 for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. (Micah 4:3-4.)

In fact, the breadth of God's final act of reconciliation is more inclusive in its sweep than even all the human race because

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, . . .
 and a little child shall lead them. . . .
 The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, . . .
 They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain;
 for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord
 as the waters cover the sea. (Isa. 11:6, 8-9.)

This universal sway of God's reign in peace and love and righteousness so that there is reconciliation between man and man, and between man and nature, holds the imagination of the Hebrew mind throughout its history.

But another dimension of God's reconciliation comes to be discerned beyond that of social justice and of harmony among all God's creatures. In fact, this vision of justice and harmony seems ever to recede like a mirage upon the horizon. Its realization is seen to be dependent upon the establishment of a new covenant between God and his people.

Something over a hundred years after Isaiah, the prophet Jeremiah spoke for God concerning the essential prerequisite for the attainment of Isaiah's vision of universal reconciliation:

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant. . . . I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jer. 31:31, 33-34.)

Here a dimension of spiritual depth is added to the nature of God's act of reconciliation. No proper relation with creation is possible for man apart from a new relation with the Creator who imparts forgiveness and renewal. So the psalmist cries out,

Hide thy face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from thy presence,
and take not thy holy Spirit from me. (Ps. 51:9-11.)

Still another dimension of God's reconciliation comes to light in the New Testament writings. Under the old covenant, mediated by prophet, king, and priest, man never came to know fully the blotting out of sin, through God's presence as Holy Spirit, which results in the creation of a new human spirit. Jeremiah's new covenant did not come to pass until God's Word encountered men, and God's Spirit embraced men, through God's own coming to men in the form of a man, Jesus of Nazareth. As a consequence, we find in the

New Testament an understanding of man himself that is barely hinted at in the Old Testament. The relation of both sinful man and renewed man to essential man as created by God is boldly explored by Paul. He exhorts those who claim to know Christ:

Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4:22-24.)

This can be accomplished, not by mere human determination and exertion, but because,

the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (II Cor. 3:17-18; cf. also Col. 3:9 f.)

This "new creation" in Christ (II Cor. 5:17), however, does not comprise a mere return to basic human innocence. Nor does it mean that the new creature is a qualitatively new form of life with no essential continuity with the old man, in either his innocence or sinfulness. Rather, the new man is a change in form through the coming to fruition of a potentiality that was contained in the old form but imprisoned and corrupted by sin. A seed of grain is a barren kernel until it is planted in the right environment of soil and rain and sun. Then there springs forth from its own inner potentiality an entirely new form of life. And so it is, Paul says, with man.

"The first man Adam became a living being [life-possessing psyche]"; the last Adam [Jesus Christ] became a life-giving

spirit. . . . The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. . . . Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. (I Cor. 15:45, 47, 49.)

All this means, then, that we must understand God's act of reconciliation, not only in the dimensions of its *breadth* of universal harmony among all creatures, and of its *depth* of full communion with God at the level of spirituality, but also in the dimension of its *length* in the full fruition and fulfillment of the original God-created potentiality of man to be in the very image of God. Only by such fulfillment is man enabled to attain full communion with God and harmony with fellow creature. This is why God's reconciliation in Christ brings not only restoration but also realization of that destiny meant for men but never before attained.

So, in Christ, man knows reconciliation as: (1) fulfillment of his true God-intended form of life in God's own image; (2) communion with God, the ultimate and continuing source of all life and blessedness; (3) harmony with fellow man and creature, the given and necessary locale of his existence.

This extended summary of the Biblical materials has been necessary in order to appreciate the richness and complexity of the reality that we have chosen to call "reconciliation," which we have experienced from God in Jesus Christ, that reality which the church is to communicate to the world. Lest, however, the meaning of the Biblical terminology is not clear to all, the attempt must be made to reformulate these words and ideas in more contemporary language and illustration.

In the speech of our day, the length of reconciliation is called "maturity of personality." The depth of reconciliation

is known as "being grasped by ultimate concern" or "being accepted." The breadth of reconciliation is defined as "reverence for life" and "togetherness." Maturity, acceptance, and togetherness—these three terms sum up simultaneously both the deep religious hunger of man in the atomic age, and the hopeless shallowness of what many men are seizing upon in their vain seeking for satisfaction. It is not enough simply to be exhorted repeatedly to "grow up," with nothing provided but a crude little do-it-yourself kit. Men must be shown the goal and the way there by One who has been there before them. All the simple formulas and tricks of Moral Rearmament, Religious Science, and other such movements are not enough to cope with the depth and complexity of human sin.

Likewise, men do not find ultimate rest for their restlessness in merely human acceptance by a psychiatrist or in the self-acceptance that is so often counseled. Men need to meet and to know the ultimate Someone who has by nature both the right and the power to accept men, to grasp men, and to claim men. Men know instinctively that this power is not in themselves or in other men, despite the bland assurances of such movements as Unity, but that at the depths of his being man is one with the Divine.

Likewise, the cult of togetherness has proved so superficial that the very word is now the butt of innumerable cynical jokes. Warm, sweet, tender feelings toward fellow men are at best ephemeral, and in reality are all too often a camouflage for avaricious egotism. Dietrich Bonhoeffer warns us (*Life Together*; Harper & Brothers, 1954) that what often passes for human love actually seeks to absorb the other, that it is "the forcing of another person into one's sphere of power and influence," loving him "not as a free person but as one whom it binds to itself. . . . It desires to be irresistible, to rule." The togetherness of the Russian and Chinese

communes is clearly created by sheer force and fear. And that of suburban and organization man in America is now judged to be a frightening sign of deadening conformity and of headlong flight from creativeness and responsibility. As noted earlier, the togetherness of the "united nations" of the world trembles on the brink of a war of human extinction.

Deeper resources and realities of maturity, acceptance, and togetherness must be found if truly redemptive and saving reconciliation is to break into human history and to direct man to his destiny.

The mature manhood that the Christian finds, and hence brings to bear on every phase of the world's life, stems from one unique source: the attainment "to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, . . . to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). This means that the concrete human personage of Jesus of Nazareth is the God-created wellspring from whom flows the one and only, the inexhaustible and unquenchable, stream of human fulfillment into all the world. To attain any degree of redemptively significant maturity in the human spirit requires that one stand somewhere in that stream.

For the Christian, this faith and knowledge means that God speaks to him his Word of encounter, once and for all but also ever afresh, in and through Jesus as the Christ. The whole life of Jesus—from birth to death and resurrection, in all its richness of word and deed and its simplicity of being—is brought to bear on the life of the disciple through preaching and teaching, through hymn and prayer, through work and friendship, in and through all the diverse forms of the life of the Christian community, as it gathers together in the sanctuary, as it spreads its life lines into the far reaches of human society.

The nature of this impact of Jesus' life is pivotal in the

whole understanding of reconciliation. Here the clichés of Christian preaching and doctrine so easily lead astray. It is not the language of initial encounter with God to say that we "believe in Jesus" and confess him as "Lord and Savior," or to say that we are "brought to the foot of the cross" where Jesus "died for our sins." Even to say that we have an "I-Thou personal encounter" with God needs explication because we have such inadequate understanding of what it means to come face to face with another human *as person*. Yet it is in this encounter with God, through the impact of Jesus' life, that human maturity has its beginning and the ground is laid for acceptance and true communion.

To those who continue in the presence of the life of Jesus, and who do not stop their eyes and ears, there comes a growing, increasingly intense awareness of evil and depravity on the one hand and of a demand for righteousness on the other. Both the evil and the righteousness are of a peculiar and disturbing character. The sense of sin that comes, as Celia in T. S. Eliot's *Cocktail Party* says, is not a sense of immorality, "not the feeling of anything I've ever *done*, which I might get away from, or of anything in me I could get rid of—but of emptiness, of failure towards someone, or something, outside of myself." Nor is the righteousness a conformity with a set of rules or a pattern of behavior that can be achieved if one just tries hard enough. Jesus is not satisfied with, "You shall not kill," but insists that "whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire" (Matt. 5:21-22). He demands not just the forsaking of adultery but even of the lustful look. (Matt. 5:27-28.) One must love not just his neighbor but even his enemy. (Matt. 5:43-44.) By this kind of demand the disciple is led to cry out in despair, "Who then can be saved? This is impossible!" To which Jesus replies, in effect, "Yes! At last you've got the point! With men

this is impossible, but *with God* all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).

In other words, the one who for very long follows after Jesus finds his heart and mind amazed, bewildered, seized with an existential fear. Neither the evil nor the good that he becomes aware of is a matter of "principles" or "ideals" or "rules" that he can isolate and manipulate and master. The evil is evil because it is against and before the Holy One. The good is not some *thing* at all but is nothing less than the very life of the One who is goodness in himself and who means good and wills to give goodness and life to all. To "believe in Jesus" means to accept this awareness of sin as the very judgment of Holy God and to accept this vision of righteousness as the very presence of the living God. This is "encounter," because through all the irritating indirectness, the bewildering ambiguities, and the frightening paradoxes of Jesus' life, it is not some *thing* but some *One* who impinges and bears in upon our consciousness and our life. This is "human maturity" because this ultimate Someone, who holds our very life in his power, treats us as *persons*. For the first time we are met by One who does not treat us as *things* to be manipulated. For the first time we are called upon to reject our enslavement to the corruption of things, as something foreign and not of our true selves. We are called upon to exert the full capacities of our freedom, not as an abyss into which to fall ignorantly, but as a way to share creatively in the very life of God.

It is at this moment of crucial decision, as human maturity trembles in doubt whether or not it can trust the One who calls it into encounter in Jesus Christ, that the peculiar nature of Christian acceptance comes to focus. Man is able to accept himself as this seemingly impossible, paradoxical unity of dependence and independence, of creatureliness and crea-

tiveness, of minuteness and greatness, of bounded determinateness and infinite potentiality, all touched and tainted by the corruptness of pride and avarice, lust and cruelty, hate and deceit — man encountered by God in Christ is able to accept his self as such and go on to new life *never* because he or any other man can believe in man. In Jesus Christ, man is made to know the incredible, unimaginable fact: God believes in this man, even when man cannot believe in himself. God loves this man, with the unfathomable love that seeks not its own but only the other's good, even when this man hates himself to the point of suicide. It is God's acceptance of man for himself, *in spite* of what man has done to himself, that enables man to accept himself and go on into a new life.

Furthermore, this acceptance of man by God requires the maturity that comes through encounter in Christ, just because this maturity is not some kind of human righteousness, but because the true love of God for man requires the equality of freedom that becomes active in man's acceptance of God's acceptance of him. Christian maturity does not consist of that self-possession and self-containment which are so often held out to men as an ideal. Rather, the complete man according to Paul is the one who finds all of his potentialities set free and brought into creative play by being brought into relation with God in Christ. This is "of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, . . . the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," the growing up "in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph. 4:13, 15).

In the light of the foregoing treatment of Christian maturity and acceptance, it might seem that a definition of Christian togetherness would easily follow. Such is not the case. This definition calls for an extensive exploration of the

whole complicated field of Christian ethics, which can scarcely be done here. The central problem comes down to this question: Granted, a man has come to know himself maturely as a result of encounter with Jesus Christ; granted, this man has been rooted again in the very meaning and power of life through acceptance by God; how is all this reflected now in the way that this man lives together with fellow man and creature? In the plain language of the ordinary man, Does being a Christian make any difference? Because a person is a Christian, is he therefore "together," in a new and different way, with spouse and child, with those he has to do with in work and play, with all men in political and cultural, including racial, relations, with animal, plant, stone, and star? Many doubt it. On the personal level, a girl whose life has been struck with inexplicable tragedy asks why Christians give the same answers to her questions as others quote to her from mankind's ancient proverbial wisdom. On the professional level, a brilliant young lawyer and mature Christian is given a year's theological training and asked to write on the implications of the Christian faith for the legal profession. After a long and heart-searching attempt, he gives it up as a hopeless task. On the social level, the church remains the most segregated institution in American life. Where is the Christian difference?

The clue to this question lies in the New Testament word for "togetherness," viz., *koinōnia*. It is variously translated as "communion," "community," "fellowship," or "participation." One of the clearest and yet profoundest interpretations of the idea is to be found in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's readable little book, *Life Together*. One of the most trenchant applications of the idea to the problems of ethics is to be found in the writings of Paul Lehmann.

The central Christian insight about togetherness is this:

men and creation have communion and community only as a reflection or expression of communion and community with God. The Christian can see in proper balance the sacredness and usefulness of all creatures only because he knows the Creator and his purposes. The Christian can regard all other men as brothers only because he knows God as Father of mankind. The Christian can accept and work within the inscrutable vagaries in the life and death of nations and cultures only because he knows the Lord of history who even now is working in and through all things to bring his Kingdom on earth. The Christian can bear, and bear with, the evil and tragedy in his own life and in the lives of others, without bitterness or despair, only because he has known merciful forgiveness and personal renewal from God even when he was an enemy of God in his ignorance and wickedness. The reality of this rootage of all human creaturely togetherness in reconciliation with God is beautifully and precisely expressed in Paul's Trinitarian benediction, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship [*koinōnia*] of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (II Cor. 13:14). Grace and love between God and man, and among men and creatures, are inseparable from deep, personal, spiritual community with God. This is true because only in this community does the very Spirit or Person of God have impact upon and entrance into the wellsprings of human personality. Only so is human life renewed and fulfilled in its true nature, in the image of God.

Does all this, then, make a difference in the way a Christian is together with, i.e., related to, men and events? This difference has all too often been identified with individual conformity to a set of well-defined moral rules concerning external observable actions. This is not the difference created in humanity by the "communion of the Holy Spirit" in

Jesus Christ. Under the impact of the Spirit of God, the Christian life is lived under an indicative rather than an imperative (Lehmann). That is to say, the Christian life is not a moral struggle to obey a set of externalized commands in a rote fashion, but is a spiritual struggle to be open and responsive to the creative leading of the Spirit of Christ. The Christian is not exhorted by an impersonal imperative but is moved by the reality (indicative) of his personal participation in the life of God. Furthermore, Christian action is contextual rather than absolutistic. His togetherness with fellow men in the events of life does not fit a well-established predetermined and therefore predictable mold. The Christian, as moved by the one spirit of Christian love, is also responsive to the unique context of each act and event in his life, because he knows that God, the Spirit, who moves from within, is the same God, the Creator, who comes to meet him without, in the dynamics and relativities of the historical process. Finally, Christian action is concerned with social structure as well as with individual behavior. The Kingdom of God consists not just of inner being and attitude but also of active relationships. And men, being finite creatures, live and act in relationship through the concrete structures of nature and society.

To summarize, then, there is, in Christian togetherness, a hiddenness because it is rooted in the Spirit of God. There is a relativity because it is contextual. There is an incompleteness because it awaits the coming of God's reign over the whole social, historical, cosmic condition of human life. This togetherness, therefore, is not something the Christian can ever hold complete, in fact or even in vision. Nor is it something that he can objectively demonstrate to anyone outside of the Christian faith, and often enough not even very satisfactorily to himself. Yet, if that maturity in Christ

which comes with acceptance by God does not find some concrete expression in a new creative togetherness with God's world, then even the Christian mind begins to call into question the reality of that maturity and acceptance. This togetherness takes many forms. The deep mutuality of understanding and acceptance, made possible by the operation of Christian love in the family circle, is often central. The community of mind and spirit experienced in the *koinōnia* of church is absolutely indispensable. And if this in-group togetherness is truly rooted in Christ, then it will find its inevitable and decisive expression in a Christian concern for persons, events, and structures in the whole wide world around.

In other words, reconciliation with one's self, realized in the event of reconciliation with God, must eventuate in reconciliation with the world. In fact, these three dimensions of reconciliation are not worked out in any chronological sequence but only simultaneously with each other. Reconciliation is God's act of working in and through all things to bring all things together in Jesus Christ so as to accomplish this one original purpose in creation. Now, then, this whole extended analysis of reconciliation leads to this conclusion: the Christian church and the individuals who comprise it are not simply the self-contained, reconciled community but also the agency of reconciliation. The maturity and acceptance that the church knows in Christ is not meant for itself alone but for the world. In coming to understand the actual content of the reconciliation it has received, the church is forced to understand that the gift it has received it must give to the world.

This fact leads to the necessity of another definition if the church is to achieve its new self-understanding. If we now know what reconciliation means, what does it mean to be

an agent? If we know *what* the church has to offer to meet and to match the hell of the world's alienation, then we must now ask *how* the church fulfills its calling and mission. The rest of this book will seek to spell out a detailed answer to this question. And it is only in the fullness of this answer that the meaning and relevance of the foregoing exposition of reconciliation can be brought out. To what level of spiritual maturity in one's self and of spiritual communion with God must one rise if his life is to be at all an agency of reconciliation to the world? Does the larger part of the membership of the church ever achieve that level? Does the impact of Christian living upon the world ever achieve such concrete proportions that we (Christians) can take seriously talk about an "indicative of life in the Spirit," a "Christian contextual concern," a "social-historical sweep in the Christian goal"? These are realistic, even haunting, questions that the church must face up to. But before they are dealt with in detail, a preliminary exploration of the general meaning of the Christian concept of agent may prove helpful.

In this study we find our beginning point in one of the major words of the New Testament, *diakonos*. Our English word, "deacon," is derived from it, but this contemporary church office does not begin to indicate its basic meaning and breadth of usage in the New Testament. The noun essentially means "servant," and the verb (*diakonein*) "to serve," and the other related noun (*diakonia*) "service." So the theme of this book could just as well be, "servants of reconciliation." But the idea of "servant" in contemporary language does not carry the New Testament meaning. It is true that in Jesus' day, as well as in ours, a servant was considered to be in a reluctant, passive, menial position. Jesus, however, gave the idea a new application and built a wholly new dimension into it: "Whoever would be great among

you must be your servant. . . . For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43-45). Here Jesus proposes a radically new concept of service: the joyful, active, voluntary submission to a reality so ultimate for man in meaning and in concern that it calls forth the total dedication of all that a man is and has in its service.

This form of greatness is little known or even talked about these days. Service to some cause, wherein a man sacrifices his life for its advancement with no thought of himself, is presumed to occur even yet in a few isolated cases involving scientists, doctors, social workers, ministers, artists, teachers, etc., although even with them the mixture of motives makes the thesis highly questionable. But to propose that men generally should find their life by losing it in the service of some transcendent cause or goal is unthinkable. Such a proposal sounds "corny" or sentimentally romantic even to those engaged in the kinds of work just listed, and it sounds completely irrelevant to the masses of men and women employed in manual labor, the trades, the factories and farms, the offices and stores. Self-advancement and self-satisfaction, through economic and social power, are candidly assumed to be the natural and therefore acceptable drives and aims of all human behavior. It is little wonder that the vast majority gladly accept a kind of impersonality and anonymity as they escape responsibility by being absorbed into a highly organized, machinelike society. And the minority that refuse characterize themselves as "rebels without a cause," or "the beat generation."

The Christian community is called by its Lord and Master to rise against this tide of the times. To be Christian means that the form of life beheld in Jesus takes shape in man's own life, individually and corporately. Jesus' life took "the form

of a servant," and "he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:7-8). The reality and cause that he served and to which he was obedient was nothing less than God himself and his purpose of the reconciliation of the world. Men are the disciples and the church of Jesus Christ only insofar as they take the same "form of a servant."

What does it mean, then, to be a servant, to enter into the service of God and his reconciliation of the world? This is still not a self-evident activity, even when it is defined as joyful, active, and voluntary dedication. Again, a full explication will have to await the spelling out of various concrete forms that this service takes. Some further indication of its general nature, however, can be gained by considering its New Testament usage and alternative translations.

There are a number of passages in which service (*diakonia*) has to do with the provision for the bodily needs of fellow Christians, by serving food or by taking up a collection for the needy (Acts 6:1; 11:29, etc.). These acts of service are certainly regarded as important expressions of Christian love but not as the definitive or characteristic form of Christian *diakonia*. More often than not, the word is translated "ministry," and *diakonos* as "minister." So Paul says Christians are "ministers of a new covenant" (II Cor. 3:6), or of the gospel, or of Christ (Eph. 3:7; 6:21; Col. 1:7, 23, 25; 4:7). We hear about the "ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4), Paul's ministry received from Jesus Christ (Acts 20:24), which is a ministry to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13), the varieties of gifts and ministry within the church (I Cor. 12:4-11, 27-31), the ministry (dispensation) of death by Moses' covenant, and of the Spirit by the new covenant (II Cor. 3:7-9). Finally, in the key passage for our theme, Paul says that God, who has reconciled us to himself in Christ, has given

us "the ministry of reconciliation" (II Cor. 5:18).

When *diakonia* is understood as "ministry" rather than "service," an entirely new dimension of meaning is seen in the Christian life so conceived. As Jesus said, "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends." (John 15:15.) The minister, even while remaining in obedience, is not related to the object of obedience in the same way as the "servant" is. The mere servant does not enter into and share in the life and concern of his master. But the servant who is caught up into an actual participation in the very being and purposes of his Lord finds his own life becoming a "minister" or medium of the life and work of his Master. "Service" becomes "ministry" when the Someone and the Something served become immanent in the life of the servant, when the life and cause of the Served become the life and cause of the servant — joyfully, actively, voluntarily.

This is the definitive character of the church that Paul sought to delineate when he spoke of its ministerial function. God, who came in Christ and reconciled us to himself, has entrusted to us "the message [word] of reconciliation," now "making his appeal through us" (II Cor. 5:18-20). This is the staggering, overwhelming, unbelievable mystery at the very heart of the life of the Christian community. Not simply that a small gathering of men have known the renewing power of the Spirit of God in their lives — that is wondrous enough. But further, that God has chosen these poor fallible "earthen vessels" (II Cor. 4:7) as the medium through which he will reconcile the whole world to himself. In this mystery alone does the church find its true meaning. Therefore, the *nature* of the church as the reconciled community is inseparable from the *function* (mission) of the church as the minister or agent of reconcilia-

tion. The *being* of the church and the *calling* of the church merge into one under the single reality of God's reconciling activity in Jesus Christ. If the church ever loses an overpowering sense of mission to the world as its very reason for existence, then it will have lost its definitive nature as the servant of God, the body of Christ, the communion of the Holy Spirit.

So we are agents of reconciliation. "Agent," as applied to either the church as a whole or the individual member, seems to carry the desired meaning better than either "servant" or "minister." As we shall see later, the concept of ministry in relation to the church has become so hopelessly confused that a complete redefinition is required before it can be used meaningfully in the life of the church today. "Agent" and "agency" possess the same ambivalence which characterizes the New Testament use of *diakonos* and *diakonia*. The church as God's agent is deeply, personally involved in God's act of reconciliation, and has been given the right and the power to speak God's word of reconciliation to the world. Yet it is not the church's reconciliation, nor is the world to be reconciled to the church. Nor is it the church's word and act, as such, that actually reconciles. It is God alone to whom reconciliation and a reconciled world belong. It is the living Spirit of God himself who alone can impart the renewing power of reconciliation through the halting, broken speech and still perverted act of the church.

We who are "in Christ" are, as individuals, "agents of reconciliation" but we always point beyond our individual selves to the richness and breadth of the whole body of Christ, the church universal, as "the agency of reconciliation." And the body of Christ as a whole always points beyond itself to its head, the living Christ, the Lord and Savior, in whom God is working to "unite all things, . . . things

in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10). This ambivalence of the Christian community is the most trying and yet the most needed characteristic of its life. Only so can it fight off a dual temptation. On the one hand, it is tempted to lose faith in itself as the God-chosen medium of reconciliation and thus become just one more social institution as it conforms to the ways of the world. On the other hand, it is tempted to conceive of *itself* as the savior of the world and thus lose its Christ-form of a servant, as it seeks itself to become the lord of the world.

Now we have completed a brief, provisional but working definition of the reconciliation that the church has to offer the world, and also what it means in general for the church to be the agent of that reconciliation. Before, however, the church can come to full consciousness of how it can fulfill its calling and mission, it must be fully aware of the mystery of its origin in the will of God, and of the meaning this mystery has for the general nature and structure of the life of the church. To these topics we now proceed in the next two chapters.

THE DIVINE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH

SEVERAL years ago a Christian convert from India made a tour of churches across the United States. As his trip progressed, he became increasingly bewildered and disillusioned. At the end, he told how he had come to America with intense expectation because he was coming to the home church from which had sprung the new mission church in India. He therefore expected to find here a community of Christian people with a Christian faith that would be infinitely richer, more mature, and more zealous than that of the new little church struggling for its very existence in India. But what did he find? It would have been disillusioning enough if he had found simply a weaker faith or even the same faith. What he heard from the lips of the American Christians shocked him. Everywhere he went, he was repeatedly asked, "Do you think that Christianity has anything to offer that is really better than what you can find in Hinduism?" Whatever else this question means, it indicates widespread uncertainty in the mind of the Western church concerning the validity of Christianity's claim to uniqueness. This uncertainty has existed for some time, in spite of the quantity of money and personnel poured into foreign missions during the last seventy-five years. It is the expression of a gnawing skepticism about the relevance of Christian

faith not only for distant cultures but even for the immediate scene of the church's American social environment. Can Christianity claim to be the only or even the main force for good in Western culture? How can the church possibly claim that it is *the* "agent of reconciliation" for the whole world? Is not this the height of arrogance? Can Christians claim that the God of all gives preference to them? How does this differ from the nazi claim of superman and superrace?

The uniqueness and universal relevance of Christianity are not to be grasped and demonstrated by a simple "look and see" method. But, then, neither are Darwin's theory of evolution, Einstein's theory of relativity, or Toynbee's theory concerning the birth and death of cultures. The "looking" and "seeing" involved in just understanding these theories, let alone in evaluating them, taxes the best powers of the human mind. The modern spirit of open inquiry, which will not take any theory for granted, has turned now to question the claims of Christian faith. And the membership of the church is shot through with doubt simply because, on the whole, it has not applied its best powers of human understanding to its own experience of God in Jesus Christ. Although Christians clearly accept the necessity of maturing in body, in mental attitudes, in social relations, in economic and political responsibilities, they have been content generally to remain at the level of children in their religious experience and ideas. Numerous surveys have shown that most Christians do not progress much beyond the twelve-year-old level in their working concepts of God, man, sin, righteousness, life, death, the Bible, the church, Jesus Christ, etc., especially as these become evident in their worship and in their religious resources for meeting the problems of everyday living. The church has been content to leave maturity in these matters to a handful of "professionals," and the pro-

fessionals have resigned themselves to the task of leading their "flocks" of dumb sheep. Thus Protestantism has allowed itself to slip back into the medieval pattern of a radical division between a professional clergy and a passive laity. There are increasing signs of dissatisfaction with this pattern, in both Roman and Protestant churches, and these signs and their meaning will be discussed later in detail. But here it must be asserted that a Christian people who will not insist on the same standards of maturity in religious faith as in all other aspects of life will not understand their nature as agents of reconciliation, and will not effectively fulfill that calling in our day.

What, then, are the grounds of the church's claim to be the unique and only source of man's salvation? An eleven-year-old, confronted with this claim in Sunday school, asked naïvely the nevertheless profound question, "How did we first get in touch with God?" The previous chapter tried to analyze the constituent elements of our own immediate experience of reconciliation. And let it be understood unequivocally that the chief driving force in the Christian mission to the world derives from this experiential, or existential, character of Christian faith. We know that in Christ we have met the true God, whereas Confucius, Buddha, Zoroaster, Plato, Ikhnaton, Mohammed, Mary Baker Eddy, Joseph Smith, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and a host of others, have given to men nothing but dim and uncertain shadows of the Reality in which human life is grounded. And we know this, not by a comparative study of religions and philosophies, but because our own deepest selves find in Christ the Source of their meaning, and the Source of power for their fulfillment, the Source who by his very ultimacy claims us for himself. Without this existential dimension, Christianity becomes nothing more than a family habit, or a cultural inheritance,

which cannot for long demand the loyalty and decisive energies of men.

Nevertheless, a purely personal, experiential faith is not adequate for a church with a world mission. When Christian faith is reduced to being nothing but a resource for self-realization through the resolution of subjective tensions and anxieties, it loses a measure of its true objectivity. Then, it is little wonder that the average Christian begins to wonder if he has anything better or essentially different from the psychological gimmicks of Norman Vincent Peale, or the yogi methods of mental control, which promise peace of mind and economic prosperity. If Christian faith is to be truly world-centered instead of self-centered or church-centered, it must pursue the question, "How did we get in touch with God?"

A full Christian answer is not only experiential but also historical. It is as we contemplate our personal faith experience in the setting of the historical process that gave it birth that we begin to be overwhelmed with the sense of its mysterious divine roots. It is not that our faith can be proved somehow by reference to objective historical events. Rather, our faith becomes firm in its self-understanding as it understands itself historically. We come to see that our faith is not a result of our having gotten in touch with God but of God's having gotten in touch with us.

The Christian can see this by relentlessly pushing the question, "Where did I get my faith, my knowledge, my experience of God?" I would scarcely claim it to be my own invention or discovery, nor would I be inclined to attribute its source simply to my parents, because no child conceives of himself as a mere replica of his father or mother. I may possibly look to my local pastor and church with a little more satisfaction. Most of us are drawn into Christian faith through

the teaching, the preaching, and the general life of a particular congregation. Yet if I delve at all beneath a mere surface attachment to the local church, I become aware that the "Christianity" that I have accepted does not originate with or belong to this small group. This group too had a beginning by being derived from a movement or denomination, and the denomination itself has a history going back to an individual such as Luther, or Calvin, or Fox, or Wesley, or to some historical event. I discover, then, that there is a family of denominations which, in spite of their diversities and even enmities, have a sense of being one, as expressed today in the movement of ecumenical, or world-wide, Christianity. My faith, therefore, is but a particular, individual, concrete instance of a faith that is shared with millions of other men. And if I push the question as to how they all can be one in the face of the startling varieties that have developed in the long complex history of the many denominations and sects, I finally am led to the simple fact that they all look back, back, back to one Master whom they all adore and proclaim as Lord and Savior: Jesus Christ.

Through this process of analysis, then, I am forced to see that my own twentieth-century subjective faith, my own personal sense of reconciliation, has quite a tremendous, objective, public history, and source. I am what I am because of a certain Man who lived about two thousand years ago, and because of the witness of his original disciples concerning his life and its meaning, and because that witness has been communicated to me with all the richness and force of two thousand years of human experience and interpretation of that witness.

So it would seem that the search for the origin of my faith finally comes to rest in Jesus of Nazareth. Then I discover that although he is the beginning of one story, he is also the

end of another. Christian faith may have its source in Jesus, but Jesus, in one sense, is the product of two thousand years of Jewish history. Individuals within the church have repeatedly tried to cut Jesus off from this background, but invariably they have been the ones who wanted to twist the life and meaning of Jesus to their own ends. For us to receive and to maintain that reconciliation made possible by Jesus Christ and his church, his life must always be encountered and interpreted in the context of his Hebraic background. So the roots of my faith continue to go back, back, back through Jesus to the exile, the Kingdom, and their prophets, still back of them to David and the judges, and then on to Moses and the exodus, and finally back to that dim and shadowy but portentous figure called Abraham.

It is a simple historical fact that no other religious, philosophical, intellectual, or cultural tradition has had so long an unbroken history, has spanned so many cultures and civilizations, has retained such inner consistency, and has manifested such creativity and powers of renewal within that consistency. This fact of itself does not prove Christian faith to be right, nor is that our intent here. But I, in my private personal faith today cannot properly understand my faith apart from this fact. I must see that my faith is a unique subjective expression, but still an expression or formation of a *community* of faith that spans four thousand years and all the oceans and isles and continents and races on the face of the earth.

It is the original, persistent, and universal conviction of this community that its faith, its knowledge of God and of his reconciliation, results from the fact that God has gotten in touch with men. In Abraham, God spoke *to* a man; in the prophet, He spoke *through* a man; in Jesus, He comes himself to speak *as* a man. And now, "*we* are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us." (II Cor. 5:20.)

The Christian community need not deny, in fact must eagerly assert, that God has been in touch also with all mankind everywhere all the time. Every scrap of truth wherever found must be hailed as signifying the presence and working of God. Nevertheless, the Judaeo-Christian community has been overawed by the dawning in its religious consciousness of certain unparalleled hopes and promises that in turn have been confirmed by inexplicable historical events. As a result, it became convinced that there began with Abraham a unique process of religious experience that was to transcend all others qualitatively, and was to achieve ultimate import for the whole creation. This community can understand itself only as coming into being out of divine mystery. This mystery is the mystery of *election*.

As the church attains a new self-consciousness today, the ancient idea that God elected or chose a certain people is being re-explored. This way of thinking about the church has not been popular for several centuries. A number of complicated historical and theological factors contributed to its demise, but not least among them was the Calvinistic formulation of the idea of election in terms of the doctrine of predestination. The theory that God, before the creation of the world and man, had predetermined an exact number of individuals for eternal life and the rest for eternal damnation could not long hold sway in the mind and life of a church centered around the love of God in Jesus Christ. Today, however, the church is gingerly trying to get a new hold on the whole idea as a result of a new concern to root the church's life again in the Biblical materials. J. Robert Nelson has noted (in his *The Realm of Redemption*; The Seabury Press, Inc., 1951) that this concern has driven Biblical scholarship to recognize that the idea of election pervades the Bible "from start to finish," and that modern theology has succeeded in its

general refusal to apply the idea to the church only "by a simple act of ignoring the evidence." This evidence is now finding increasing expression in the church's literature of self-reflection and cannot long be ignored if the church is to recapture a true understanding of its mission to the world. For example, there is *The Witnessing Community*, by the French lay theologian Suzanne de Dietrich (The Westminster Press, 1958), and the more scholarly yet very readable treatment by H. H. Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election* (Allenson & Company, Ltd., London, 1952), and the profound reformulation of the whole doctrine of predestination in Chapter VII of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* (Charles Scribner's Sons).

The sense of being elected is in essence the inexplicable, disturbing conviction that the concrete, mundane, historical existence of the Judaeo-Christian community cannot be explained in merely empirical terms. The tracing of its life sources issues ultimately into the realm of the mystery of God's will, God's purpose, God's activity. Exactly when this conviction dawned in the consciousness of the Hebrews or their ancestors, no one can say with certainty. The Hebrew Scriptures themselves sometimes locate it in the event of the exodus from Egypt under Moses (Hos. 11:1; Jer. 2:2; Ezek. 20:5), sometimes all the way back in the time of Abraham (Isa. 51:2; 41:8 f.; Micah 7:20; Ps. 105:5-10). Whatever the immediate awareness was in the mind of Abraham or the mind of Moses, their descendants came to see, with increasing clarity and conviction, the hand and will of God in the lives of these ancestors and likewise in the entire history of Israel. The high, ethical, religious consciousness that obtained in Israel during the prophetic period from 750-550 B.C. did not conceive of itself as something new, springing full-blown from the minds of the prophets. Rather, the prophets themselves looked back to classic figures and to a series of notable

events in order to explain and to justify their own prophetic proclamations. To try to determine the exact origins and stages in the development of this religious consciousness raises all sorts of complicated and technical problems that cannot be treated here. But the general characteristics of the Hebraic idea of election must be delineated at least in outline.

First, there is the point that God's calling and choosing always takes place in a concrete event. Dreams, visions, oracles, angels, are all incidental and related to some great overshadowing events: the moving of the Abrahamic family out of Ur onto the Fertile Crescent around the Arabian desert, looking for a new land; the crucial deliverance from slavery in Egypt; the establishment of the kingdom under David; the prophetic voices in the midst of moral and political chaos; the exile in Babylonia and the return under Cyrus. The God whose hand was seen and voice heard by Israel was no all-absorbing Oversoul or highly abstract philosophical Idea. He was known as a living, active, purposive, personal Presence. How, then, did this election differ from the protection supposedly proffered to tribe or nation by anthropomorphic hero gods?

Secondly, it must be noted, the decisive events in which election occurs all have a certain quality. All the events just listed could have been observed, described, and even photographed by a modern news reporter. If so reported, they could have been interpreted and explained by a team of psychologists, sociologists, and historians to their own satisfaction and within the terms of their sciences, with no reference to "God" and certainly not to "miracle." What made these events acts of God was clearly not anything that was unequivocally manifest and observable. For the Hebrew, however, there was in them an element of discontinuity, a creative departure that was inexplicable by reference to any existing

conditions or background. They were convinced that this creative factor transcended even the highest imaginative capacities of the human heart. It was no mere fanciful human daydream. Seized by an impossible vision, they acted, in faith, on its terms. And then historical conditions and events completely beyond their control made the vision a concrete possibility.

Such creativity occurs repeatedly in many phases of human interest and activity, and these occurrences are what fills the human race with wonder at its own existence, and what finally places the heights and depths of the human spirit beyond the subtlest probes of all the sciences. Whenever the human heart is open to such creativity, it is drawn into the realm of the religious, of God, whether it recognizes and admits it or not. The Hebrew awareness of this creative factor, however, took a form unique in the total history of man. It centered around one growing conviction: that they who were "no people" were made to be "a people." The mystery that lay at the base and core of their life was that they had been created out of nothing. The most ancient sign of their reality was found in the vision of Abraham. When he and his wife, Sarah, were already over ninety years old and childless, there came the fulfillment of the promise that their descendants would be as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands of the seashore. There came forth Isaac, and from Isaac, Jacob, and from Jacob, twelve sons, and so a people was born when the world could promise nothing. But this people ended again in the nothing of slavery in Egypt. Then, through Moses, came the promise of deliverance and of a land. And the fulfillment of this promise, recorded in the annals of human history, became the central sign and symbol of their election as a people.

"Election" then meant one simple thing for the Hebrews:

trust in their destiny as a people founded on absolutely nothing but the promise of their God. Here is a people that refutes identification in any of the usual ways. Made up originally of a heterogeneous collection of families and tribes, with constant accretions from the nations they passed through, there is no such thing as an identifiable Jewish "race." Almost constantly on the move, from Abraham until today, there is no such thing as a Jewish culture or civilization. What is a "Jew"? This question has received intense and profound analysis in recent years by both Jew and Gentile, with no consensus in definition but with general agreement that the very existence and persistence of the Jewish people is a profound historical mystery. The people of the promise: that is about the best that can be said. And whenever they sought to live by something other than the promise, they lost their character and sometimes almost their existence as a people.

If this seems strange to us today, it must have appeared insane in the cultural milieu in which Israel emerged. Every god then was attached to a land, and every land possessed a people. The bond that tied god, land, and people together was actually physical as well as traditional. The god was as bound as were land and people. A god without a people was like a soul without a body, impotent. But now comes the ludicrous, unimaginable, impossible event of a God who elects, chooses, his own people. And the people is not one of the great peoples of the earth. In fact, it is no people. His election of a people creates a people. And he sustains them, in slavery, in the wilderness, in the midst of enemy nations, through exile. No such God had ever been known before. Here was a sovereign God who could demand absolute trust because here was a God who could create something out of nothing and who created out of his own free will. This vision

of God was startlingly and inexplicably original, whatever the time at which it came to explicit consciousness in the life of ancient Israel. And as this vision of the free, sovereign, electing God was acted upon in faith, it was "proved" to those who so acted by the birth, growth, and maintenance of themselves as the elect people. So Christian faith finds its ultimate source in the mystery of the divine election of a people.

A third important characteristic of election lies in the nature of the *relation* between the electing God and his elect people. The relation between man and the divine had been understood in several different ways. There was the crude anthropomorphism that explained the otherwise inexplicable good and bad in human experience on the grounds that the divine is an arbitrary, capricious tyrant who uses men simply for his own amusement. There was the view of the divine as a supernatural force that could be brought under some control, either by use of magic to bend the force to the service of human ends, or by divining the secret directions of the force's flow and thereby accommodating human actions. Still another trend asserted a sensitivity to the immanence of the divine in all of nature as man himself participated in nature (fertility) or as nature impinged upon the life of man. This immanent divinity was conceived in a variety of ways, animistically with a separate spirit dwelling in each thing, polytheistically with distinct gods for each major area of life, or monistically with one god regarded as the source and determination of all life (as the common idea of mana, or as Ikh-naton's sun god). It is notable that the whole sphere of concern with human behavior toward fellow man developed and remained largely unrelated to the religious concern in the environment of ancient Israel. Ethics, as a self-conscious human concern, rose first out of family relations and then spread to absorb political, social, and economic behavior. When ethics

and religion were finally connected, as in the case of the Egyptian sun god, the god was brought into the ethical sphere simply as a judge to enforce the ethical rule. Hence the god himself was subservient and even subject to the independent, transcendent, moral law (cf. J. H. Breasted's *The Dawn of Conscience*; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933).

An entirely different possibility in the relation of man and the divine came to light in the Hebraic experience of election. They became a historical people as the result of the free sovereign choosing and calling of them as a people by their God, Yahweh. But in every approach of God to this people which he formed, there was another peculiar element — a demand. And the demand was not for the first fruits of the field or of the human body, not for a share in the spoils of war or for the performance of magical or mystical rites. The demand was simply and strictly for *faith*, for trust in God. The Lord promised childless old Abraham a vast race of descendants, "and he believed the Lord, and he reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). The new and different relationship implicit in election was the *covenant* relation.

In the election of the Hebrews, God relates himself as *Person* to men, and to men as *persons*. The relation of God and man is known as a reciprocal one wherein man is not just an object but a subject. The demand of God for this response of man in a relation of mutual faithfulness did, of course, for the Hebrew, involve the whole life of man. The Hebrew had no idea of a soul or spirit or life distinct from his bodily existence. So his dedication to God appropriately included sacrifices, but as symbols of his heart's gratitude or of his claim of God's promise of forgiveness. Even more especially did the Hebrew come to see that righteousness in his relations to fellow man is a reflection of his right relation (faith) to God.

(Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 6:4-5.) All the various ethical codes are merely approximate formulations of the will of God. The Lord is no mere judge who enforces a transcendent law. The laws, in all forms, are the creation of the Lord as partial means for the realization of his own sovereign will or purpose. This radical transformation of the meaning of righteousness and of the relation between ethics and religion remained largely implicit in the covenant religion of Israel. The people as a whole repeatedly lapsed into the practice of pagan sacrifice and of humanistic moralism. The great prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. condemned them for this lapse. But it was only after the coming of Jesus Christ that the covenant relationship could be defined explicitly in terms of a righteousness of faith. (Rom., ch. 4; Gal., ch. 3.) And even Christianity is constantly tempted to revert to ritualism and legalism, and Christian theology today has not yet found a satisfactory formulation of the relation of ethics to faith.

Thus far we have seen that election, in the Hebraic-Christian tradition, always takes place in historic event, and takes the form of the creation of a people, who are drawn into a covenant relation with God. A fourth and final dimension of election must now be added.

The problem of the arrogance that constantly tempts the people who know themselves to be elect has not been met. This temptation has constantly threatened the Judaeo-Christian people, and has led at times almost to their destruction. After all, arrogance on man's part is the exact opposite, the very negation, of trust in God. Yet when this people have sought escape from arrogance by the denial of their election, they also have rapidly lost their identity through being conformed to and absorbed by the world around. Her religious leaders sought to curb Israel's arrogance by repeatedly reminding her that she had been nothing before God called her.

into being, and that she was impotent until he had delivered her from Egyptian slavery and had given her a land and a king. But this exhortation to humility by the recall of humble origins did not work with Israel — even as it does not work with today's aristocracies. After all, they are in a superior position, and success is the product of piety, and piety is grounded in God's favor.

It was not until the Kingdom of Israel had been demolished, and a bare remnant retained its identity in exile in Babylonia, that a prophet arose from the remnant who caught a vision of the meaning in the mystery of Israel's election. Obviously, God had not chosen her because of anything she possessed or could give to God. She had nothing and, in fact, was nothing at the beginning. God had not loved her so much more than other nations as to protect her from conquest and exile. Why, then, had God called her into being and spent fifteen hundred years, from Abraham to the exile, in an exasperating effort to conform her to his will? This prophet of the exile, whose name was lost and whose work was attached to Isaiah's, finally put the answer very succinctly:

Thus says God, the Lord, . . .

“I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness,

I have taken you by the hand and kept you;

I have given you as a covenant to the people,

a light to the nations.

. . . You are my servant,

Israel, in whom I will be glorified. . . .

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant

to raise up the tribes of Jacob

and to restore the preserved of Israel;

I will give you as a light to the nations,

that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

(Isa. 42:5-6; 49:3, 6.)

This Second Isaiah, then, came to see that God does not desire or seek the salvation of just a handful of men by electing Israel. God has not lost his love and concern for all men and all creation. Contrary to the Augustinian-Calvinistic formulation, God's historical election of a special people, and the implicit rejection of the rest, does not mean a deliberate salvation of a few and the damnation of all others. God has struggled and strained over the education of this select group, not as an *end* in themselves, but as a *means*, an instrument, an agent. This people has been given the light of God's life and truth and love so that they may carry that light to every darkened corner of human existence. God has given them the experience of salvation that through them his salvation "may reach to the end of the earth." They are not the final circle of the redeemed people but the redeeming people. Election is not to privilege but to service. Or, the privilege of election is the privilege of service. The church is not the reconciled people but God's minister, servant, agent, for the reconciliation of the world.

In spite of this brilliant prophetic proclamation that the restoration of Israel "is too light a thing" for the great Creator and Ruler of the universe to be concerned about, even the restored remnant of the nation could not quite believe that their God was really concerned about anyone else. In the story of Jonah we have the memorable portrayal of Israel's reluctance to call the Gentiles (Nineveh) to repentance. Israel, symbolized by Jonah, admits quite openly that she fled from God's command because she would rather die than share God's love with the nations of mankind. (Jonah 4:1-3.) The very prophets who had the clearest vision of Israel's election were most sensitive to her inability to fulfill it. They therefore looked forward to the coming of a dimly and diversely pictured figure of God's anointed King (Messiah), or

of God's Suffering Servant, who would finally fulfill Israel's calling. Sometimes the figure was pictured as the whole of Israel, sometimes as a purified remnant of Israel, sometimes as a mysterious lone individual. But the coming of this Servant-Lord is closely associated with the redemption of Israel from obscurity and with the realization of God's purpose of universal salvation.

Thus far we seem to have considered election only in Old Testament terms. Actually, the designation of the basic elements of election has been made possible only by looking at the Old Testament record through the eyes of Christian faith. We have depicted a meaningful interrelationship among: the events of Hebraic history; the coming into being of Israel as a people; the development of the covenant relation between God and his people; the purpose of this covenant as Israel's mission to be God's "light to the nations"; and the vision of the fulfillment of this mission with the coming of a God-anointed Servant-Lord. The plain fact is, however, that this meaningful interrelationship is not spelled out in the Old Testament itself. It does not rise to view for one who is restricted to a reading of the Jewish Scriptures in the context of purely Jewish ideas. This is demonstrated by the fact that contemporary Judaism is not interested in the same themes, nor does it regard these Scriptures with the same seriousness as evidenced in the foregoing analysis of election. What Paul said so long ago still is true from the Christian perspective: "To this day, when they [the Israelites] read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away" (II Cor. 3:14).

This means that the historical election by God of a people to covenant relation, for the purpose of their being his light to all the nations, came to conscious understanding and effective realization only in and through Jesus Christ. For the

Christian community, this fulfillment means that Jesus was God's "Anointed" One ("Messiah," "Christ"), that Jesus was the hoped-for mighty One, who came in the humble form of the Suffering Servant. So although we have traced the origin of our experience of reconciliation and renewal back *beyond* Jesus all the way to Abraham, yet we have been able to perceive God's electing activity in Hebrew history only by looking at it *through* Jesus. In a sense, God's election is restricted to this one single Man, because only in this Man is the *purpose* of election realized. From this perspective, the people of the Old Covenant (Testament) can be said to be elect only as seen in relation to this Man. And the people of the New Covenant can be said to be elect only as they live in this Man. Yet the fulfillment of election in this one Man was made possible only by God's historical election of the people of Israel. And the mission of this Elect One to all the world is fulfilled only by his "ministry of reconciliation" through the community of his disciples, his church.

Thus it is that, as a Christian seeks to trace his personal religious experience of renewal to its source, he finds that not just his personal faith but the life and meaning of the whole community of Christian faith is rooted in divine mystery. It is the mystery of election, of God's calling. The Christian church as a whole must have an awareness and a conviction of its having issued out of divine mystery or it will never fulfill the purpose of its election, namely, to be the servant of God as his agency for the reconciliation of the world. The early church was possessed by this awareness and conviction. And in a comparatively short time, the inbred provincial people of God, who had spent two thousand years wandering around one little corner of the world, became a missionary people and burst across the face of the civilized world, transforming the character and direction of human history.

What made the difference was the life of just one member of the Jewish people, Jesus of Nazareth. His disciples came to see that in him had come that power to set men free from sin which was to be the sign of the Messiah. But Jesus stressed the servant character of his own life and of the discipleship to which he called men. By this strange emphasis Jesus clearly broke with all the contemporary expectations concerning the Kingdom of God. Gradually, Jesus made it clear to his followers that the manner in which God was present in his life meant that a new covenant, a new relationship, was now established between God and man. Those who responded to Jesus' call to "follow me" would not be gathered in a temple, with a special priesthood and rituals, and subject to a rigid legal code administered by a ruler. They would not be characterized by race or nationality, by culture or class. They would not have the security of a land or sacred place to call their own. They could not depend on the protection of armed force or legal justice. Their success would not be won by the usual sensual appeal, or promise of fortune and power, or by cleverness of words and logic. To the woman of Samaria, Jesus said, "The hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. . . . God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:21, 24.)

Here, then, the peculiar character of the election of the Christian church becomes discernible. The call of God comes, in Jesus Christ, for men to come into a relation with him in spirit and truth. But in contrast to the covenant established through Abraham and Moses, this call in Jesus Christ does not first create a people with an organized life, to whom then is added later a mission or task to be performed. Rather, the electing call of Jesus Christ reverses the procedure. Men, any kind and all kinds of men, are called into devastating, trans-

forming, renewing encounter and communion with the holy, loving God. As filled and possessed by God's love, they are compelled to serve that love in the mission of the reconciliation of the world. And this common possession of love and mission creates a community of men.

This gathering of men, in the community of faith in Christ, did not in the first days think of itself as a people, with all the technical organization and physical status this would imply. Rather, the followers of Jesus took unto themselves the ambiguous designation *ekklēsia*, which was the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *qahal*. This means they thought of themselves as a gathering or assembly of men at the behest or call of God. They were a people or a community only as they were held together by their calling, and their calling was to service, to be the agent of God's reconciliation of the world, to be "the salt of the earth, . . . the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-14).

Naturally, necessarily, this community of men in Christ assumed forms of organization, of worship, of confession. They developed forms of teaching, proclaiming, and witnessing to the reality of God's reconciliation that had come into the world in Jesus Christ. This was natural and necessary, just as it was natural and necessary for God's love to take the form of a man, of a servant, if that love were to dwell on the earth and be made known to man. However, these forms could never be absolutized or made ends in themselves as had occurred in ancient Israel. The absolutes in the life of the Christian community are the gift of God's love in Christ and the inner compulsion to make this love known in all the world.

Unlike ancient Israel, therefore, the church of Christ cannot become an introvert and exclusive people, who then reluctantly and impotently accept a mission that requires it to

break out of itself. The church by its very nature is open-ended, because its very being consists of a calling to be concerned with the world rather than with itself. The church is to be outgoing and self-sacrificing rather than ingrown and self-protective. And the community of men in Christ are enabled to be so, in contrast to the people of God in Moses, by one significant difference: the divine mystery out of which the people of the old covenant came was one of *promise*; the divine mystery on which the church is founded is one of *fulfillment*. In Jesus Christ, God has accepted men into communion with himself in spite of man's sin; in Jesus Christ mature manhood has become a reality; in Jesus Christ the love that can bind all men together as brothers has been set loose into the world. And the divine mystery of this acceptance, this maturity, this togetherness, did not die on the cross but rose victorious. The living Christ now works this mystery in the life and history of mankind through his continued presence in what Paul mysteriously called "the body of Christ," the church (I Cor. 12:12-27; 6:15-20; Eph. 1:22 f.; 4:12; 5:29 f.; Col. 1:18; Rom. 12:4 f.).

Admittedly, this is a staggering claim to make about the church. But this is not a claim made arrogantly *by* the church. Rather, it is a claim made *on* the church by God, and must be accepted humbly and fearfully by the Christian community. This divine dimension of the life of the church seems so mysterious and incredible as one contemplates the so human and worldly forms of the church, that one wonders how the mystery can be related meaningfully at all to the everyday, mundane, pedestrian activities of the Christian community. Is it not inevitable that the church loses faith in itself?

The God who in Christ is the source of the mystery of the church also provided for the human need for meaning.

Chapter 4

WAYS TO HUMAN MEANING

OUR primary concern in this book is with the *structure* of the church. *How*, or in what *ways*, does the church fulfill its calling to the *diakonia* ("service," "ministry," "agency") of the reconciliation of the world? In the last twenty years there has been a flood of books on the nature (being) and function (calling) of the church, but mostly in general theological terms. There has been theological excitement about the recaptured vision of the church as the body of Christ, the *koinōnia* ("fellowship") of the Holy Spirit, the household of God. There have been stirring declarations that the church is to rededicate itself as the herald and spearhead of the coming of Christ's Kingdom to all the world. But this vision and this rededication have scarcely been grasped at all at the level of the local congregation, and have barely affected denominational programming in any significant way. In other words, all of the new, ideal, theological theory has thus far borne little fruit because it has not effected any significant reformation in the definition and practice of the *working structures* of the church's life.

THE RELATION OF MISSION AND MINISTRY

Yet, such a reformation of structure must occur if the new vision is truly of God. Whenever God's creative, transform-

ing power (grace) breaks into man's life, that power takes some concrete form or structure. God's grace never appears in sheer immediacy or formlessness. At the same time, no form or structure in this corrupt and creaturely world ever wholly, or perfectly, or permanently encases and holds captive God's graceful presence. Although God and his creative purpose do not change, they take on ever-new forms in consideration of the unique limitations and possibilities of the specific context in which God chooses to act. So God's grace is both form-destroying and form-creating whenever God prepares for a new departure in his saving activity.

The first three chapters of this book, therefore, have briefly summarized our contemporary theological vision of the being and calling, the nature and mission, of the church. This summary has been a necessary prelude for the derivation and definition of a reformation in the structure of the church's life. It is not some given and set structure that determines the church's life and mission. Rather, it is the calling or mission that God wants fulfilled which has determined the church's essential being or nature. And so the imperatives of this same mission, responded to by this community of men, must also determine the relative and changing structures of this community's life. To put it simply, church structure is a function of church mission, relative to new vision and new conditions.

So we have seen a world in alienation. We have heard of God's will to reconciliation. We have traced our existence as a Christian community into the depths of the divine mystery of election. But how does this divine mystery become an actively functioning reality, how does it clothe itself in human meaning, in our life as a church today? Granted, God was present in the great historical events of the life of ancient Israel, and he called men to be his disciples in Jesus Christ.

In what concrete forms or media does God encounter us and dwell with us today? In what specific ways does the church itself serve as the "body" of Christ, that is, as the bodily mode of the continuing presence of the living God? Do we simply have to take the Bible's word for it, on the basis of something called "blind faith"? Did the historical presence and activity of God that started with Abraham come to a stop in its consummation in Jesus Christ? Or does it flow on into the life of the church by means of some concrete historical continuity with the historical life of Jesus of Nazareth? Since the latter is the church's claim, then how can such historical continuity be understood so as still to allow for the discontinuity demanded by the form-destroying and form-creating character of the grace of God experienced in Jesus Christ?

THE TWOFOLD MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

These are all questions concerning the *structure* of the church's life. These and other related questions can be answered only by a dual analysis of church structure. First (Chapters IV and V), we must try to see what structures exist for the establishing and maintaining of the *ekklēsia*, or "congregation of people," who know the reconciliation of God in Jesus Christ. Secondly (Chapters VI and VII), there must be a delineation of the structures that enable this *ekklēsia* to fulfill the purpose for which God created it, to be the agent of his reconciliation to the world. On the one hand are the structures for maintaining the *being* of the church; on the other hand, the structures for fulfilling the *mission* of the church. It has already been stated that God's *purpose* for the church was determinative of the *nature* of the church. So, logically, the structure for mission would seem to deserve first consideration. But experientially, in the human perspec-

tive, being drawn into a community of people who know spiritual renewal in Christ comes first. And out of this experience arises naturally and inevitably the sense of mission.

In fact, it will not be our concern so much to argue whether the being or the mission of the church is prior to the other as to discern very carefully their interrelationship. In the actual living existence of the church, its being as a community of the faithful and its functioning as an agent of reconciliation are scarcely separable. Likewise, the structures that serve one or the other merge and blend indistinguishably. Yet it is of utmost importance to make the distinction, and for the church to have a conscious concern for both. When the distinction blurs and is lost, either the church becomes a self-satisfied in-group without a sense of world mission, or it becomes an activistic do-gooder organization without the power that comes from being rooted in the divine life.

The close interrelationship of the two structures of the church's life is indicated by the fact that the New Testament uses the same word to designate both: *diakonia*. We have already translated this word variously as "service," "ministry," or "agency." This means, then, that we can speak of the church's ministry in a twofold sense. In either case, it is the same thing that is being "served" or "ministered," namely, God's saving, reconciling activity as centered in Jesus Christ. But in the one case, there is that structure of the church designed to minister this reconciliation for the maintenance and upbuilding of the church itself. This we will call the *church-directed ministry* because it is directed toward the church's own spiritual well-being. In the other case, there is that structure of the church's life which makes the whole church a "minister" of God's reconciliation to the world. This we will call the *world-directed ministry* because it is directed toward the reconciliation of the whole world to God, and leads

to the church's self-abnegation and self-sacrifice as it follows in its Lord's own way of the cross.

Before we begin our analysis of this single ministry in its two forms, one more clarification of terminology must be made. When we speak of these ministries as "structures" of church life, we do not have in mind that institutional organization of the church usually called "polity." Certainly, the ministerial structures will find implementation in the church's polity, and any radical reformulation in the church's understanding of its ministerial structures may very well demand revisions in polity. But the thesis is here asserted that the same basic concept of ministerial structure may operate whether a denomination's polity is congregational, presbyterian, synodical, episcopal, papal, or some combination of these. The ministerial functions we have in mind remain the same because they are rooted in the constant nature and needs of the church, and because they are empowered by Christ's gift of grace. These functions, then, represent work that must always be done, and therefore structures that remain the same in the deep permanent strata of the church's life whether the church is organized and controlled by pope, or bishops, or priests, or clergymen, or elders, or deacons, or superintendents, or vestrymen, or officials, or congregational vote, or the claim of "inner light."

As will be argued in detail later, ordination of whatever kind or form does not distinguish those who fulfill ministerial functions from those who do not. Yet we call these functions "structures" because they are something more than formless, momentary "leadings of the Spirit." The grace of Christ that makes them possible does not consist of a completely supernatural influx of and possession by something called "the Spirit." The deep spiritual conviction that one is called by Christ to perform certain services in the life and

work of the church has its rise in the context of the gifts of unique personality and capacities through the equally mysterious biological and sociological processes. These providential gifts are called into his service by Christ to fulfill certain continuing needs and tasks of the church. Hence a certain continuity and objectivity inheres in these functions and in their modes of fulfillment so as to justify their being called structures, while at the same time they cannot be tied inseparably to a set of concrete organizational forms. The meaning and validity of this thesis can become clear only in an explication of the ministries themselves.

What, then, is the structure, the nature and function, of what we have chosen to call the *church-directed ministry* (*diakonia*, "service")?

By following the historical development of this structure in the life of the church some very startling facts come to light. First, in its original conception this ministry was much more diversified than usually has been represented in the church's organizational forms. Secondly, the church has passed through several phases in its implementation of this ministry and has therein put stress on varying aspects of it. Thirdly, the church today is entering a new phase in which the relevance of the traditional clergy-laity distinction is being called seriously into question in the light of a gradual revision of the church's understanding of its mission to the world. Fourthly, this new departure is also forcing the church to a rethinking of the meaning of ordination, by which certain individuals have been set apart for the ministry or ministries of the church.

THE NEW TESTAMENT NORM

The life and thought of the first Christian community remains normative for every generation of Christians. We have

seen that our experience of reconciliation today is grounded in a long historical process that centers around the life of Jesus Christ. Our only knowledge of and contact with him comes to us through the testimony of the first generation of Christ's disciples. And the only clear-cut and dependable form of that testimony lies in the Biblical record of it.

As we turn first of all, therefore, to the Biblical record of the life and thought of the early church, we do not turn to a self-evident document with a static meaning. The church's testimony proves to be a dynamic medium for the experiencing of the inexhaustible riches of God's life and wisdom. In Paul's letters particularly, we find such a profound and complex discussion of the church-directed ministry that any complete and definitive exposition is impossible. But with the help of recent Biblical studies we can give some fairly reliable answers to certain questions concerning this ministry: Whence? What? Who? and Why?

Paul makes it eminently clear that the structure of the church-directed ministry is derived from and determined by no one other than God himself as he has manifested himself through Jesus Christ. The church's essential ministerial structure is no merely human invention, evidencing compromise of the supposedly "purely spiritual" character of the church. In each of his major passages on the subject (I Cor. 12:4-31; Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:1-16), Paul stresses that the ministry is the gift of God through grace in Christ, is inspired by his Spirit, is assigned or appointed by God. It is God who has provided the necessary structure for the maintenance of that nature which will guarantee the fulfillment of that work for which he has called the church into being.

Paul does not spell out how God gives this grace and makes these appointments. H. Richard Niebuhr, in his *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (Harper & Brothers, 1956),

has shown true Biblical insight in suggesting that there are three modes by which God effects his gifts and appointments. First, there is the private call. But, contrary to Niebuhr's interpretation, ought this not to be understood as the call that all Christians have in common, the call, that is, to reconciliation from the same God, to the same Lord, by the same Spirit? Secondly, there is the providential call. This comes by God's gifts of what Jesus called "talents," which we are to use in the service of God's Kingdom. So every human, natural ability becomes a divine gift when called into service for Christ's church. Then there is the ecclesiastical call. The Christian *ekklēsia*, or "community," helps to judge how any individual's private and providential calls are to be related for the best possible advancement of the life of the church in Christ.

Although Paul answers quite clearly the question of the "Whence?" of the church's ministry, he is more ambiguous on the "What?" and the "Who?" So the church down through the ages has thought in very different ways as to what functions are to be designated as ministerial and who are to be regarded as ministers. As Niebuhr has noted, sometimes the prophetic function has been stressed; so the minister is the one who preaches. At other times, emphasis on the priestly function yields the picture of the minister of the sacraments. The figure of the minister as pastor rises from the importance of the care for the souls of the flock. The need for organization of the diverse areas of church life calls for a minister as administrator. Yet again, the concern of the church for sound doctrine has at times exalted the minister as teacher. The way in which these different ideas of the ministry found expression in the history of the church will be dealt with next. But first we are concerned to see how the early church viewed the matter.

The plain fact is that the New Testament concept of what is the church's *diakonia* ("ministry," "service") and who is the church's *diakonos* ("minister," "servant"), is much more diversified than the list in the previous paragraph would indicate. As David Noel Freedman has noted in his article "The Slave of Yahweh," it must be remembered that the basic Hebraic concept of "servant" or "work" indicates *function*, not *status*, among men. All men are "slaves" or "servants" of God, and therefore under obligation to work because God is Creator and men are his creatures. So the idea is also *relational*, because no man possesses his function in his own right but only in dependence on God. If, then, the church is that community of redeemed men who know God, their Creator, and who have been called to serve God, not out of bitter obligation, but in happy obedience, then all members of the church are God's "servants" or "ministers." Yet some would ask, Is there not a special kind of ministry within the church, analogous to the priesthood of the Old Testament? Let us see what was the situation in the early church.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians (ch. 4), we have perhaps the classic New Testament passage on the church and on that ministry which is directed toward its own life and well-being. In unparalleled language Paul plays upon the theme of the oneness of the church as the body of Christ: "One body . . . one Spirit . . . one hope . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, . . . the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied" (Eph. 4:4-6, 16). "But," Paul says, in contrast to this unity, indeed to make this unity possible, "grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift" (v. 7). The "one body" is not a homogenized mass of duplicate saints in a state of static equilibrium. Rather, its members possess a rich diversity of gifts from Christ and fulfill ac-

cordingly a diversity of functions or services (*diakonia*). In I Cor. 12:4 ff., this character of the church is made even more explicit. "The same Spirit" is manifest in "varieties of gifts." "The same Lord" provides and demands "varieties of *diakonia*" ("service," "ministry"). "The same God . . . works all things in all." And it is only by the proper functioning of each of these many diverse parts that the whole body has unity and health. Each part is indispensable and as deserving of honor as any other.

What, then, are these diverse gifts and ministries or services? The Ephesian passage lists: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers (Eph. 4:11). If these were all of the church-directed ministries, we might easily infer that Paul has in mind a kind of elite, pious minority on whom the majority depend for the ministry of grace — an incipient clericality distinction. As already noted, the passage in First Corinthians explicitly denies such an inference, and when the lists of gifts and ministries in the three Pauline passages are put in parallel columns, then the passage in Ephesians must be understood in an entirely different light.

| <i>Eph. 4:11</i> | <i>I Cor. 12:28</i> | <i>Rom. 12:6-8</i> |
|------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| apostles | apostles | |
| prophets | prophets | prophecy |
| evangelists | | |
| pastors | | |
| teachers | teachers | teaching |
| | workers of miracles | service |
| | healers | exhortation |
| | helpers | contributing |
| | administrators | aid |
| | speakers in tongues | acts of mercy |

It is clear from the context of each of these lists that in every case Paul has in mind the *same general structure* in the

life of the church: the diversified church-directed ministry, based on the variety of Christ's gifts in all the individual members who comprise his body. This would mean, then, that the church-directed ministry is at least as inclusive as these combined lists. And if this be true, then the inference seems irresistible that the church-directed ministry includes some kind of service (*diakonia*) from *every single member of the church*. Furthermore, there is no elite in the spectrum of ministries, from the apostle ("the very least of all the saints," Eph. 3:8) to the one who only contributes or gives aid. No one can look on another and say, "I have no need of you," because every form of ministry is necessary "for the common good" (I Cor. 12:21, 7). So The Acts of the Apostles speaks without differentiation of the *diakonia* of the apostles (Acts 1:17, 25), of distributing food (ch. 6:1), of the word (ch. 6:4), of financial help (ch. 11:29), of Paul — as received from the Lord Jesus (chs. 20:24; 21:19).

Repeatedly, Paul stresses the basic equality of all members of the body of Christ. How could it be different when it is recognized that whatever one does in the church is not an expression of personal status but is based on a gift of Christ, an appointment by God? Furthermore, whatever one does must be regarded as an act of *service*. Paul's predominant use of the idea of *diakonia* as descriptive of the Christian life is undoubtedly reflective of his dominant picture of Christ as one who "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant," who "humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:7-8). So we are to be "united with him in a death like his," because "the death he died he died to sin, . . . but the life he lives he lives to God" (Rom. 6:5, 10). Here is a clear reminiscence of Jesus' own teaching that "the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"

(Matt. 20:28). And “a disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.” (Matt. 10:24.) So “whoever would be great among you must be your servant.” (Matt. 20:26; 23:11.)

Nevertheless, it is just as necessary to see that, in the early church, this equality of *personal status* before God and in the church did not at all mean that everyone shared equally in all *ministerial functions*. (Rom. 12:4; I Cor. 12:29 f.) The *diversity* of gifts and services was as important as the church’s one Spirit, one Lord, one faith. Certainly some individuals had several gifts or talents and hence shared in several ministries. Paul served as apostle, preacher, and teacher. (II Tim. 1:11; Col. 1:24-28.) Some who were appointed to wait on tables so that the Twelve could concentrate on preaching (Acts 6:1-6) also turned out to be powerful preachers (Stephen, Philip). But the important thing was that *everyone* had some ministry (service) to perform, and that the life of the church requires that every member and joint of the body shall perform its service. This leads us to our final question concerning the early church’s ministries, Why? Why has Christ given these gifts? Why has he created this ministerial structure as a permanent character of the church? What is accomplished by their “proper working”?

Paul’s answer to this question clearly indicates the *church-directed* character of these ministries. He explicitly states that the variety of Christ’s gifts to the members of his body were for one purpose: “for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). In this passage, Paul gives only a partial list of the diverse ministries, but that he has in mind the all-inclusive ministries of the whole membership is indicated in the context. There he speaks of the “grace . . . given to *each of us* according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (v. 7), and says that these gifts were given “for the equipment of the

saints for the work of ministry" (v. 12, omitting the usual comma after "saints"). "Saints" is Paul's term for all the members of the church, and the "ministry" spoken of here can be no other than those "varieties of service" (*diakonia*, "ministry") which have been given "for the common good" (I Cor. 12:5, 7).

The common good, to which each member contributes by fulfilling his unique capacity, is the building up of the body of Christ, the church. By these ministries the church is built up both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively, the membership is increased and spread by *proclamation* (*kērygma*) of the Word of God (Jesus Christ) in such a way that men are led to encounter God, to hear his call and claim on their lives, and so are brought to decision. Qualitatively, the membership of the church is intensified in its faith by the teaching (*didachē*) of the Word to those who become Christ's disciples, "until *we all* attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

The quantitative growth and spread of the church and the membership's qualitative maturation in the Spirit were of equal concern in the early church. All the diverse ministries of the church were bent to the upbuilding of the church in this dual sense. These ministries were understood as the ties that bind the church of any generation back into the life of God in Jesus Christ. These are the continuing modes of his living presence and work by which a community of men (*ekklēsia*) are held in being and made to be the body of Christ. But again Paul stresses that these ministries are inclusive of the whole membership and life of the church: "Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole

body, joined and knit together *by every joint* with which it is supplied, when *each part* is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love" (Eph. 4:15-16). Thus the mystery of God's calling and constituting a special community of men to serve him is made humanly meaningful through the structure given by Christ to the life of that community.

HISTORICAL VARIATIONS

We have now analyzed that structure as understood in the early church by asking of it the questions: Whence? What? Who? Why? The insights and practices of the early church remain normative for the whole history of the church because, as already noted, the apostolic church comprises the foundation on which that history must be built. Nevertheless, the *history* of the church is just as important as the *origin* of the church when the church of today attempts to understand the functioning of its own ministerial structure. The origin of the church, in Jesus and his disciples, is separated from us by nineteen centuries of historical development. Even the Biblical record of the early church does not lie before us with its original meaning floating on the surface. Rather, we today read and interpret that record in the light of the meanings discovered by all the previous generations of the Christian community. And as that record comes alive with new meaning for us today, it speaks (God speaks!) out of its infinite richness to our unique situation and to our particular needs.

This ambiguity in our relationship to the first Christian church comes out clearly in the matter of ministerial structure. The words "minister" and "ministry" do not call to our mind at all the same pattern or picture that we have drawn on the basis of the New Testament record. The gen-

eral membership of the church, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, does not think of itself as participating in the ministry or priesthood of the church. Traditionally, these members have not regarded it as their responsibility to build up the body of Christ, quantitatively or qualitatively. This has been the job of a group of professionals, those called to "full-time Christian service." They are the ministers or priests, a group of Christians set apart from the rest, supposedly initiated into certain divine mysteries that the rest cannot understand, given a stamp of peculiar holiness by a peculiar ritual called ordination. Even the word "church" has held ambiguity for some Christians who do not think of *themselves* as the church. For them, the church is something one joins, and it consists of an organizational superstructure composed mostly of, and clearly run by, the clergy.

There is abroad in the contemporary church a widespread unrest and dissatisfaction concerning this traditional assignment of a second-rate status to the large bulk of the church's membership. The basic, though unconscious, reason for this unrest lies in the impotence of this traditional structure any longer to impart concrete human meaning to the mystery of the church's election as the community of God. And as the church as a whole loses conviction about its mission under God, so does the isolated clergy, in spite of their faithful mouthing of the old formulas. Thus the whole church lapses into being a self-contented in-group, little different from so many other social organizations.

Christ, however, does not let his body, the church, cut itself off from himself and die. Through the written word of the New Testament, the living Word recalls the church to its origin and foundations, and so prepares for a new departure in the life of the church. Before we can see what that new departure in the operation of the ministerial structure

may be, however, we must first recall briefly how and why the church developed its traditional ministerial forms. In this way we will escape the fiction that the contemporary church should be nothing but a literal reproduction of the New Testament community. Rather, we will see that each age of the church must make its own meaningful implementation of the one, unchanging, Christ-given ministerial structure of the church.

Hendrik Kraemer, in Chapter II of *A Theology of the Laity* (The Westminster Press, 1959), has given an excellent summary of the scholarly materials on the history of this subject. Only the very high spots can be mentioned here. The development of the clergy-laity distinction is the most significant one for our concern in the whole history from the early church to the present. The distinction had already made its appearance in the second century A.D. and grew steadily in force, not being effectively challenged until the time of the Reformation under Luther and Calvin. The first thing that must be noted about the distinction is that it had no place or recognition in the ministerial structures given to the church by Christ. It has already been emphasized that the early Christians recognized the important, even necessary, diversity of ministries in the church, but never admitted a classification or division according to importance. All were important, and Paul claimed that the most important gifts of Christ were the spiritual ones of faith, hope, and love, which all must share in or be futile servants. (I Cor. 12:31 to 14:1.)

The words "clergy" and "laity" are rooted in two Greek words that certainly are used in the New Testament in reference to the church. But they are never used with the meanings that developed in church history. They never refer to a division of the church's membership into two groups or classes, let alone to a distinction between ministers and non-

ministers. "Clergy" is related to the term *klēros*, which, in the New Testament, is used only in the sense of "allotment" or "inheritance," never with its other possible meaning of "magistrate," or its derived meaning of "priest." Furthermore, the "inheritance" received from God is shared in by the whole church (Col. 1:12), rather than given to a special group who minister it to the others as they see fit. Obviously, therefore, the concept of the "clergy" has been derived from other than Biblical sources, and its acceptance or rejection must be argued on more than Biblical grounds.

The concept of the laity, however, is more problematic. This word is related to the Greek term *laos*, which means "people." As the church is becoming more self-conscious today, there is an increasing tendency to speak of it as "the people of God." So it is sometimes argued that we ought to develop the use of the term "laity" by stressing its reference to Christians as the called people. This proposal is highly questionable for several reasons. Basically, the historical usage of "laity," "lay," and "layman" within the church is quite unrelated to the Biblical concept of God's *laos*. The predominant influence in this ecclesiastical terminology came from the Graeco-Roman political environment of the church. The government was divided between the *klēros*, or "magistrates," and the *laos*, or "people." The former were those who possessed wisdom, were trained, and had power to act. The latter were ignorant, uneducated, and so were to submit passively to direction. Likewise, in Western culture, including the church, the term "lay" came to indicate the mass of the uninformed (in any field) who are incapable of making responsible judgments or of acting with authority.

Nothing could be further from the Biblical idea of God's chosen *laos*. His people have been called into being out of the mass of humanity, and the people as a whole are distin-

guished by their knowledge of God and their power to do his will. When this collection of men cease to know God and to do his will, they cease to be his people. And they failed precisely when they came to think that being God's people was something natural, inherent, and guaranteed, because then they abdicated their right to knowledge in preference for professional prophets; they forfeited their own worship to the mechanics of priestly ritual; they yielded their responsibility to act to the sovereign power of a king.

It is little wonder, therefore, that the New Testament does not typically refer to the Christian community as a people. The Hebrews' emphasis on their being a people and a nation chosen by God had blinded them to the purpose of their calling: to be a light to the Gentiles. They conceived of their call as one to a place of privilege, rather than to a life of service. So there is only one passage in the New Testament (I Peter 2:9) that directly characterizes the Christian community as a nation and people, and that is written by Peter, the apostle "to the circumcised" (Gal. 2:7-8). Elsewhere, the disciples of Jesus are called an *ekklēsia*, a congregation of men held together by the call of Christ and by the fellowship (*koinōnia*) of the Holy Spirit. And the major thing that is said about this community is that it is called to be God's servant (minister, agent) of reconciliation. And the very nature of this ministry of reconciliation, as will be explored in the next chapter, should prevent Christians from thinking of themselves as an elite people of privilege.

Thus we see that the historical concept of the laity is totally foreign to the New Testament understanding of the church. And Kraemer is surely right in concluding, "Just because the Biblical content and intent of the concepts *laos* and *klēros* is essentially different from the meaning 'laity' and 'clergy' have historically acquired, it is confusing to use

these terms with their very distinct connotations for Biblical categories" (p. 52).

How, then, are we to understand the fact that the distinction between clergy and laity was drawn so early in the history of the church, and that it came to play an increasing part and to have universal acceptance in the life of the church? There are those so-called radical Protestants who insist that every development beyond the actual conditions of the New Testament church must be regarded as a perversion. For them, "reformation" means literal return to the practices of the first church. Such a view was not held in the classical Reformation of Luther and Calvin; nor can such a view be defended if the historical character of God's saving activity is recognized. If Christ does not leave his disciples desolate but comes as Holy Spirit to guide and direct them "to the end of the world," then the major developments of church history must be understood in relation to his continuing work in the world.

The main reason why the clergy-laity issue is such a thorny problem lies in the early confusion concerning the relationship between ministerial function and organizational leadership. The New Testament literature indicates no fixed pattern for this relationship in the early church. It is clear that there was organizational leadership that was distinct from the ministerial structures. Thus the local congregations chose elders (or bishops) to make sure that things were done "decently and in order." When a serious dissension arose in the church, delegates from the congregations were sent to confer on the matter with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. (Acts, ch. 15.) So Paul records that he laid his case "before those who were of repute," and he was given the right hand of fellowship by those "who were reputed to be pillars" (Gal. 2:2, 9). Nevertheless, elders or bishops are never listed

by Paul as one of the ministerial gifts from Christ. Nor is it ever indicated that eldership or any organizational leadership was conferred only on certain kinds of ministers (apostles, prophets, teachers, pastors, etc.). Nor did the possession of a certain ministerial gift automatically include one in the organizational leadership. And, as will be detailed later, ordination by the laying on of hands was not a definitively specified ritual to set off one class or status of Christians from all others, such as all who possessed ministry, or all who were organizational leaders, or all who had a combination of these responsibilities.

In the several centuries that followed, however, ordination came gradually to be restricted in its application to seven distinct classes. The seventh or highest level gave the power to teach and to administer the sacraments. At the same time, the administrative, organizational offices and powers were gradually restricted to those who were ordained. The elders (presbyters) and bishops were always those who had attained the highest level of ordination. This group of the ordained came to be known as the clergy or priesthood, and the amalgamation of both spiritual gifts and administrative authority in the same group eventually led to the conclusion that this group alone possessed the true and full Christian life. Over against them was placed the laity, or plebs, the mass of common, worldly Christians.

The details and order of this development are too complex to be recounted here. The causes and reasons are at times obscure or even unknown. Yet it is safe to say that one factor that operated as a major determinant was the sudden massive spread and growth of the church, and this in the context of the mounting chaos and collapse of the very fabric and structure of Roman civilization. These conditions were even intensified in the Middle Ages when primitive tribes were as-

similated en masse, and the church had to assume the role of the chief cultural force for continuity and unity. In other words, the very power of the Christian faith to convert the peoples of the Roman Empire, and the problems involved in assimilating them into the life of the church, of necessity led to an ever more exactly defined and more rigidly structured organization. And when, in the Middle Ages, Christianity became the very warp and woof of Western culture while the conversion of European tribes went on apace, the demands for leadership from the institutional church grew by leaps and bounds.

Again, if the continued presence of Christ with his church, and if the Lordship of Christ over history, are taken seriously, these organizational developments in the life of the church must be regarded as falling within the will and work of God. It is impossible to accept the view of radical Protestantism, which constructs an unreal, idealized picture of New Testament Christianity and then regards the whole development from A.D. 100 to A.D. 1400 as perversion and apostasy, as a great chasm in history when "true" Christianity was nonexistent. The form that the ministerial structures of the church took in each historical epoch must be understood as the product of the response of the Spirit of Christ in the church to the concrete, unique, historical conditions of that era. The truly Christian situation is never pure idealism or pure materialistic historical determinism. Rather, the pure creative Will and Spirit of God are injected into the finiteness and corruption of the historical, and the best possible potentialities of the latter are set free for realization.

Nevertheless, this very way of regarding the presence of God in the life of the church prevents us from accepting any form of ministerial structure as final and perfect. The ministry of grace and life to the church remains in the hands of

God as he, through Christ, gives the gifts that enable men to be his ministers, his servants, his agents. So the "building up of the body of Christ" may be accomplished through diverse forms at different times and places: through a diffused ministry in a loosely organized congregational life, through a diffused ministry with organizational leadership concentrated into the hands of a few, through the uniting of ministerial and organizational function in a single, minority priesthood, and through countless other combinations and refinements. Trouble has come whenever the church or some part of the church has tried to absolutize and finalize some specific form of ministerial structure and ecclesiastical institution. Whenever this has happened, the form-destroying character of God's grace has come into operation, followed by the creation of new forms, as the church has been called back to its encounter with God in Jesus Christ, and as it is called forward by the new tasks that God sets for the church in a new historical situation.

Throughout the Middle Ages there were voices that repeatedly asserted that the distinction between clergy and laity was being drawn too sharply. This distinction gradually came to infer that full Christian piety could be achieved only within the ranks of the clergy, and so the laity was viewed as essentially secular, that is, in the world and so not quite in the church. In this way, a strange contradiction developed in the life and thought of the medieval church. Precisely as the medieval vision of the unity of nature, society, and church developed, the church became ever more alienated from the world of nature and man. The church increasingly loomed up as a strange esoteric institution with mysterious cults and rituals, unfathomable doctrines, and infinitely complex legal and organizational systems. The great mass of the Christian people came to think of themselves as the passive recipients

or objects of grace from the church, rather than as responsible subjects within and for the church. The people as a whole, therefore, lost their sense of Christian calling and mission. Inevitably this spiritual vacuum spread to engulf the clergy until the priestly orders were shot through with cynicism and materialistic opportunism. *Whenever a particular formation of the church's ministerial functions fails any longer to impart to the whole membership a sense of mission to the world, then that formation lies under the judgment of God.* The time for reformation is at hand.

✓ The voices of criticism within the medieval church grew into a chorus of protest. In the supposedly Christian world, humanistic studies turned to pre-Christian culture for their inspiration, the new science developed almost in silence out of fear of ecclesiastical reprisal, and incipient nationalism issued in open rebellion against the theory of a Holy Roman Empire. Yet all of these forces of protest were incapable of effective reformation in the church until sparked by the work of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin. Again, the Reformation is an exceedingly complex historical phenomenon, so that here only a few rather unscientific generalizations can be made. But in respect to our chief concern, it can be safely asserted that one of the most significant and conscious drives of the Reformation was to attempt a radical revision in the ecclesiastical forms of the ministerial structures.

This aspect of the Reformation is usually discussed as the doctrine of "the priesthood of all believers." It developed in the midst of Luther's attack on the claims to power by the church's clerical hierarchy, especially by bishop and pope. In his "Appeal to the Christian Nobility," Luther declared, "We are all consecrated as priests by baptism, as Peter says: 'Ye are a royal priesthood, a holy nation' (I Peter 2:9)." This thesis has generally been taken as one of the leading prin-

ciples of the Reformation. The fact is, however, that this terminology plays no part in Calvin's theology, and what Luther meant by it is actually contradicted in its popular interpretation in later Protestantism. Luther never encouraged the practice of an egalitarian individualism in which each Christian interprets the Bible to suit himself and acts as his own priest. To claim that this principle of "every man for himself" is of the essence of Protestantism is to speak of a Protestantism that is completely foreign to that of Luther and Calvin.

These men had no interest at all in doing away with an ordained clergy, although they preferred the Biblical designation "ministry." The great Reformers were deeply disturbed by two developments in the medieval church. First, there was the gradual concentration of all authority in the hands of the priestly hierarchy, reaching a pinnacle of practical tyranny in the office of pope. The Reformers argued that power and authority reside in the church's membership as a whole, and that priests or ministers exercise them only on the consent and election of the whole. Therefore, it is the whole membership that remains responsible for the life and work of the church, while certain tasks and functions are assigned to certain individuals by the calling and ordination of Christ through the church. Calvin insisted strongly that the ministries comprise the government of the church, but also made it clear that their authority is representative and functional for the doing of things "in decency and in order"; and their power is strictly ministerial in that they minister or communicate the living Word (Christ) to the church. It is the authority and power of the Word, and of the Word alone, with which the minister speaks and acts in the church.

Secondly, the Reformers objected to the theological justification that the medieval church had developed for its

priestly structure and forms. By this means a unique, supernatural, and indelible character was claimed for the priesthood. Thus what was merely a matter of functional form for the Reformers was absolutized as a matter of permanent, qualitative status. The Reformers regarded the development of a clergy or ministry as a functional necessity. Even the concentration of authority in the clergy could be justified for a time under certain conditions. But the theological definition of clergy as a superior and qualitatively different status of Christians violated the basic nature of the church, and absolutized something that was finite and relative. It was this very absolutization which made the structure of the medieval church so rigid that it could not respond as a whole to the call of God to re-formation. So another great schism and splintering in the body of Christ was necessary in order for Christ to reassert his Lordship in the church, and to wrest control of it from the hands of men, and to prepare it to serve him in a new world situation.

In proclaiming the sovereign grace and Lordship of Christ, therefore, the Reformers proposed a return to the Biblical concept of the church as a single unified body in which all were saints and priests. One would have expected that this principle, plus a strong anticlericalism, would have led the Reformers to a complete repudiation of the clergy-laity distinction. This conclusion was drawn by some radical sects. They, however, pushed to the extreme of eliminating all ministerial diversification and insisted on a simple undifferentiated brotherhood. These groups either died out or remained static, or developed ministerial classes and ecclesiastical organization as they grew. The Reformers saw from the outset that their new groupings of Christians required strong leadership. And their emphasis on the primacy of the Word called for a strong preaching and teaching ministry, espe-

cially if the congregations as a whole were to attain that spiritual maturity which would enable them to act as responsible saints and priests.

In many of the Lutheran and Reformed communions that developed in the following centuries the minister of the Word and Sacraments became almost as distinct from the congregation as was the priest in the medieval church. So today the terms "clergy" and "laity" are as common and at home in most of Protestantism as in Roman Catholicism. Again, the reasons for this development are very complex, and have been admirably summarized by Kraemer (pp. 62-69). But is it adequate to regard this development simply as a failure, e.g., a failure of the Reformers to be Biblical enough, or a failure of the congregations to achieve spiritual maturity, or a failure of the ministers to accept humbly the role of servants? Rather, the Reformers' concept of a ministry within a priesthood or family of saints, and the growth of a strong, distinct ministry of the Word, must be judged to be the only effective and relevant form that Reformation could take as the church faced the new world being born in the Renaissance. For four hundred years, in both the new communions of Protestantism and in the new Roman communion that followed the Council of Trent, this Reformation produced a virile, renewed form of Christian faith that circled the globe and made converts of every nation. This formulation of the ministerial structures of the church imparted to that church a new sense of divine mystery and mission, and "built up the body of Christ" across the world. To call this a failure (from the Protestant view) or an apostasy (from the Roman view) is nothing less than to lose faith in the faithfulness of Christ as Lord of his church, and to deny the providence of God as Creator of this world.

IN the last forty years there has been a great revival of interest in Luther and Calvin. There has been a concerted effort to recapture the original force of their insights. So some have raised the cry, "Back to the Reformation!" Others have pointed to inferences of the Reformer's ideas that were never drawn out and tried. They see our need as that of "completing the Reformation." After four hundred years, however, surely something more drastic is needed. Hendrik Kraemer has rightly declared that manifold movements in the church of today comprise a "sure indication of a rising feeling that a radical reformation of the church is due. Probably more radical than the Reformation of the 16th century, because the pressure both of the Spirit and of the world are upon us to rethink and reshape the response to the divine calling of the church" (p. 99). Kraemer further contends that the new reformation will revolve around the laity, because the church today stands in a new historical epoch and must be reformed to fulfill its mission to the world. And it is the laity who will be the spearhead of this mission now, because it is the laity who live in and impinge upon that world of man that must now be made to feel the power of the gospel of Christ.

The author of the present book subscribes wholeheartedly to Kraemer's essential thesis and point of view, but also con-

tends that Kraemer's proposed reformation in both the theory and practice of *the church's ministerial structures* is not radical enough to accomplish the renewal of the church and the fulfillment of its mission in our day. If the mere word "laity" is preserved at all in our ecclesiastical terminology, all the traditional distinctions between clergy and laity will reassert themselves. Simply a greater emphasis on the importance of the laity will not prepare the church for a new understanding of its mission of reconciliation. The very term "laity" inevitably implies the existence of a clergy, a superior clerical class of Christians. It also specifically denotes, in contemporary language, a class of uninformed and therefore irresponsible people. They accept as passive objects, rather than act as responsible and effective agents. The church is now ready for, and its God-given mission now demands, *the complete abandonment of the clergy-laity distinction*. The historical epoch that opened with the Renaissance and Reformation came to an end in the first half of the twentieth century. The church would be ill prepared to move, under God, into the future if it were satisfied with merely bringing to completion the insights and the institutions of the sixteenth century.

That God is calling the church to reformation comes to light most clearly in the so-called younger churches outside of Europe. In Asia, Africa, and South America, new Christian communities are being formed, and in many places the mere transposition of the ancient, European, ecclesiastical institutions is being labeled as irrelevant and ineffective in these new environments. What is not so obvious is that the churches of North America fall into the same category. It has always been assumed that there the various communions are simply extensions of the European parent bodies, wholly determined by the latter in matters of polity, doctrine, and traditions. Today, some younger church historians are sug-

gesting that such a view blinds one completely to the most important realities and developments in the life of the church as it took form in the wholly new situation of American civilization. It has been asserted that although the European forms of ministry and polity have been maintained on the surface, a true church in the European sense has never been fully actualized in the New World. The separation of church and state, the removal of rigid class lines, and the principle of equality in all the citizenry served as the stimulus for a radical laicization of the church.

The actualization of a truly younger church could not be fulfilled, however, for at least two reasons. First, under the tutelage of the European parent bodies and of European-born leaders, the American denominations jealously guarded their independence from one another and encouraged the continuation of European traditions. Secondly, the Americans failed (for complicated reasons) to develop their own theology, which might have brought to light and justified the reformation of church life that was incipient in the American situation. Since the end of World War II, these two limiting factors have ceased to operate. An as yet unnumbered host of younger theologians (Biblical, historical, doctrinal) are rising up to give the American church deeper Christian foundations and a clearer sense of direction in its mission. At the very same time, truly new younger churches are being formed through the process of union among various denominations. These unions are giving occasion for the restructuring of church organization and the redefinition of the very nature and mission of the church. And the new American theology, freely borrowing from but transmuting the European sources, is ready to guide the new churches to a fruitful and truly Biblical, Christian implementation of the laicization of the church.

SIGNS OF READINESS

Let us analyze, therefore, the readiness of the church to move beyond the clergy-laity distinction and the implications this has for a new formulation of the ministerial structure of the church. Kraemer has also given a good brief survey of the manifest stirrings across the church as it questions the traditional concept of the laity. There are the numerous and very diverse laymen's movements in both Europe and America. The World Council of Churches has established a Department on the Laity that is producing important literature. And, very significantly, Roman Catholics are seriously calling into question the passive character of the laity in that communion. This is evident in recent papal statements, in such organizations as Catholic Action and Catholic World Congress, in numerous theological writings such as Yves M. J. Congar's outstanding work, *Lay People in the Church* (The Newman Press, 1957). But these stirrings are only the manifest ones. They are but surface signs of a widespread but unexpressed restlessness and impatience of Protestant clergy with the isolation of their status. There are also signs of a more restricted but just as intense a dissatisfaction of laymen with their religious immaturity and their secondary status in the life and work of the church.

It is our thesis here, however, that even the most thorough and effective intensification of the active role of the laity will never rid the church of what is now an archaic clericalism. Nor will it prepare the church for the recapture and fulfillment of its sense of mission. If the mission of the church in our day is to be accomplished by the *whole* membership of the church as it lives in the world, then the designation and treatment of the majority membership as a second-class laity must cease. Or to put it in our earlier language, if the whole

church is to be the agent of its world-directed ministry, then the whole church must be shown to participate in its church-directed ministries. The dependence of the former upon the latter will be spelled out in detail later, but now we must see what happens within the church when the clergy-laity distinction is eliminated.

Whenever this elimination is suggested, immediately someone asks, "What terms, then, will we use in place of 'ministers' and 'laymen'?" This question goes to the heart of the matter, because what is called for is not just a change in terms but a radical and difficult shift in a way of thinking. The change involves more than the invention of new terms that would indicate that we think of ministers a little less reverently and of laymen a little more seriously. The change suggested means that we must cease thinking of the church's membership in a way that categorizes it into two classes. The difficulties in the way of such a shift are admittedly stupendous. But there is a readiness in the church that must not be ignored but must be responded to as the leading of God's Spirit. Psychologically, there are great numbers of both clergy and laymen who can no longer take the distinction seriously. Organizationally, the distinction is already breaking down in congregationally and presbyterially constituted churches, and even in some episcopal ones (those with bishops). Theologically, all truly Protestant communions have elements in their doctrine that actually demand the elimination of the distinction, or that at least make it tenable. The so-called Catholic traditions (Eastern Orthodox, Roman, Anglican) face a more difficult theological problem if they are to eliminate or even seriously mitigate the division of the church into two groups on the basis of qualitative status. But even within them there are stirrings that may lead to more radical developments than are now visible. Biblically, in the

common origin and norm of all Christian faith and life, we have already seen that the clergy-laity distinction had not been formed as an essential in the ministerial structures of the church.

Before this diverse readiness of the church can be exploited, however, the problem of the elimination of the clergy-laity distinction must be seen to have two sides. And the elimination will never be successful if only one side is attacked. On the one hand, we must seek to eliminate our habit of regarding the large majority of Christians as unordained laymen who have no part in the ministry of the church. But this will never happen unless, on the other hand, we cease exalting a small minority of Christians as ordained clergy into whose hands is concentrated the whole ministry of God's grace, and who therefore stand as mediators between Christ and his people.

The elimination, from the church's mind, of the traditional concept of the laity may not prove to be so difficult. A description of what this will mean will reveal that in many quarters of the church we have already moved far toward its realization. The situation should be something as follows: Every Christian is to regard himself and every other Christian as a minister (*diakonos*) in the church. According to Paul, every member of the body of Christ (the church) must be regarded as having some gift of grace from Christ, the head of the body. One cannot be engrafted into his body without drawing, in some measure, upon his truth and life. Thereby, each member and joint of the body has some contribution to make, some service (*diakonia*) to perform, for the upbuilding of the body. The service or ministry may be that of preaching or teaching, it may be that of contributing or performing deeds of mercy, it may be simply (!) manifesting the spirit of faith and hope and love in the *koinōnia*

(“community life”) of the church. No one or no group performs all of these ministries. Everyone shares in one or more of them. Each and every gift from Christ is needed for the functioning of the whole. No one form of service can look down on another as unimportant or unnecessary.

When all the members of the church regard each other in this way, then no distinction between a clergy and a laity need be maintained. There will not then be one large group of members who are merely passive recipients of grace from another small group who are the active ministers or agents of grace. Each member will be both an active minister of his own special gift of grace to the rest of the body, and also a thankful recipient of the riches of grace that are offered to him through all the other diverse members. Every sensitive pastor and preacher has had the experience of being humbled and enriched by the strength of the simple faith and sacrificial love of some obscure saint who was utterly incapable of preaching a sermon or assuming organizational responsibility. The whole truth and life of Christ resides only in the body (church) as a whole, and makes entry and becomes operative in the church only as every member fulfills his particular ministry. The “communion [*koinōnia*] of the Holy Spirit,” which makes the church “one body” in Christ, is not something possessed by one group of members (clergy) and meted out to the rest (laity). The church’s oneness is the expression of the spiritual communion that the one God maintains with all the members. So the dependence of the members on each other is a reflection of their basic dependence on God.

It must be stressed, however, that this oneness in *koinōnia* and these all-inclusive ministries do not mean that the church is to take the form of the Quakers’ unstructured fellowship, or the pure democracy of ideal congregationalism, or the un-

fettered spiritualism of the pentecostals. The shattering of old forms does not imply the abolition of all form. Everybody's business is still nobody's business, and it does not get done. The members of the church do not share equally in all the ministries. Not everyone is a preacher, or teacher, or pastor, or healer, or helper, etc. Maintaining the *diversity* of ministries is just as important as ascertaining that every member shares in the church's ministry. If all members had just one gift or if all members tried to claim and fulfill all gifts, the church's work would not get done.

This point is clearly illustrated in the life of any contemporary church. To be an effective minister of the Word through preaching and pastoral work requires certain providential (natural) gifts and extensive training. The demands placed by the church upon this form of ministry have always been heavy, but today they are even being intensified. Because this form of ministry requires the participants to fulfill their vocation largely within the church, it has traditionally been regarded as *the only* ministry. Hence all ministerial functions were supposed to be fulfilled by these ministers or priests. For example, the teaching ministry has also been attached to this office, and the pastor or priest is still officially responsible for the teaching of doctrine. The traditional program consisted of compelling the children to attend regular church services, putting them through a catechetical class before confirmation at the age of ten or twelve, and a dependence on the family to do the rest with prayers and Bible-reading at home. So a church building used to consist of a large, single-roomed sanctuary.

During the last century all this has changed. The sanctuaries have shrunk in size and are dwarfed by sprawling educational buildings for Sunday schools or full-time parochial schools. And who is doing the teaching? Great numbers of

so-called laymen, who are provided with the best of educational materials and who participate in elaborate training programs and planning sessions. The church has discovered that if the *teaching* ministry of the Word of God is made the exclusive right and responsibility of the preaching, pastoral ministry, then the church is filled with people who are so religiously ignorant and illiterate that they cannot even worship rightly, let alone witness effectively in the world. This kind of failure left the medieval church a hollow sham by the fifteenth century, and the modern church the same by the nineteenth century. Today, the educational programs of the local congregations are so extensive that many are employing full-time ministers or directors of Christian education, of youth work, and of adult education. Others are using the part-time services of some one of their own members who is especially capable, though without any extensive training.

In this situation the distinction between clergy and laity breaks down completely, and the diversified character of the church's ministry is seen in its most significant reality. The man who takes over a church school class of twelve-year-olds and becomes both their teacher and friend, or the untrained woman who nevertheless with love and care introduces five-year-olds to the story of Jesus, does more as a teaching minister (*diakonos*) than the pastor ever can. Such persons soon come to learn and to know more about teaching the Christian faith at a certain level than pastors will ever know. In this particular area of the church's ministry, they are the experts and the pastors are the "laymen." The same kind of sharing in the diversified ministries of the church operates in many areas of the church's life. The oversight of physical and financial concerns is another sphere in which the pastors are laymen. The care of the poor, the sick, and the lonely is a ministry handled by still another group in the congregation. The ministry of music is almost wholly out of the

pastor's hands. In spite of increase in training in psychotherapy by the seminaries, it is not unusual for a congregation to have several members who are able to smooth and adjust harsh human relations better than the pastor. Every church has a solid core of generous, unselfish contributors who financially carry along the majority whose sense of Christian sacrifice does not extend to the matter of money.

When the church is viewed from this perspective, then Paul's description of it takes on meaning: "The whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love" (Eph. 4:16). And in this picture, the preaching, pastoral *diakonos* ("servant," "minister") takes his place not above but alongside of all the other members of the body, each of whom has his own *diakonia* ("service," "ministry") to perform. So, Paul says, "There are many parts, yet one body." And no one part can say to another, "I have no need of you." "On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable. . . . God has so adjusted the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another." (I Cor. 12:20-25.) When the members have this care for one another, then the first part of the task of eliminating the clergy-laity distinction is accomplished. Everyone is a *minister* of some gift to all the others. And everyone is a recipient of Christ's grace through others. All members stand in the *koinōnia* of the mutual sharing of that which they all alike receive from another, from God in Jesus Christ.

THE REDEFINITION OF ORDINATION

As noted above (p. 103), however, there is a second part in the task of accomplishing a new reformation in the structure

of the church's ministerial functions. The traditional concept of the laity will never be eliminated, or even significantly modified, until the church also radically rethinks and recasts, or casts out completely, its traditional concept of the clergy. The latter will prove to be much more difficult than the former. Over against the apparently growing participation of the whole membership in the various ministries of the church, there still remains the blunt fact of *ordination*. If every member is in some way a minister for the building up of the body of Christ, why are some set apart, and usually above, by a ritual or formal public act called ordination? One would think that a quick and simple answer could be given concerning a practice of such long standing and widespread usage in the church. The fact is that no definitive answer can be given at all. There is an overwhelming and irreducible diversity in both the theory and the practice of ordination among the various Christian communions and in different historical periods of the church. There is utter confusion today even within some denominations as to who should be ordained and why anyone is ordained. On the other hand, other Protestant communions practice an ordination that clearly sets the minister off as holy and as separate in his office, as is the priest of the Roman Catholics.

In the face of this confusion, one is tempted to conclude that the elimination of the clergy-laity distinction also calls for the complete abandonment of all ordination, in both theory and practice. Can the inclusion of every member into some form of the church-directed ministry be taken seriously as long as a minority group is set above and apart from the rest by an ostensibly mystery-laden ritual that seems to impart unique powers and privileges? It scarcely seems possible, yet another alternative that does not eliminate ordination altogether must be explored. Such an elimination would mean

the loss of something that has been both a spiritual reality and a practical necessity throughout the entire history of the church. But if the inclusive ministry of the church's whole membership is to be realized, certain concepts of ordination, and some phraseology connected with it, must be purged from the mind and practices of the church.

In a day of reformation we must look back again to the life of the New Testament community as normative, even though not as final. The materials we have to go on, however, are even more obscure on ordination than on the ministry. They may be summarized as follows: (1) Ordination is the impartation of special divine power for the fulfillment of special service (*diakonia*) to God. In this general sense, the whole church and every member of it are ordained, called, elected by God as his servant. (2) This general ordination is accomplished by engrafting into Christ by faith and by the imparting of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. The exact relation of baptism and the laying on of hands is not clear in the New Testament (Acts 2:37-41; 8:14-17; 9:17-19; 10:44-48; 11:15-18; 19:2-6), but they are inseparably associated and are meant for the whole membership. (3) Ordination by the laying on of hands was also practiced in a more limited way: on the Seven (Acts 6:6), on Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:3), on Timothy (I Tim. 4:14; II Tim. 1:6), and by Timothy (I Tim. 5:22).

Jesus himself never used the laying on of hands for ordination but only for healing. Yet he encouraged the practice of baptism, and was deeply concerned that the reception of Holy Spirit followed baptism. He also assigned special tasks to special disciples. The early church probably adopted from Judaism the practice of ordination to special tasks (ministries) by the laying on of hands. But the few passages listed in the last paragraph do not indicate universality or uni-

formity in either meaning or practice. In Judaism, ordination by laying on of hands was basically an act by the community, but could be performed by the individual rabbi in the name of the community. (Cf. Acts 13:1-3 and II Tim. 1:6.) The act symbolized and enacted the pouring of the spiritual power and authority of the community into an individual or group of individuals to act representatively for the community. It did not impart any special kind of grace or holiness or authority that did not already reside in the community as a whole by the presence of God. The authority assigned by the act was not one of legal right but of spiritual power. It was a designation of special work or function, not of personal status or privilege.

All of these meanings from Judaism are probably present in the New Testament practice. But they do not answer the main question that we are here concerned with: Did the laying on of hands split the Christian community into two well-defined groups, clergy and laity? The evidence indicates a clear-cut negative. Obviously, "being ordained by hands" is not equivalent to "having a gift for ministry." In the first place, every member has some gift for some form of ministry. Moreover, there is no unequivocal instance in the New Testament when the laying on of hands was used as the mode of appointment to any one of the ministries listed by Paul (apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher, etc.). In other words, one may have a ministerial gift and practice it without having been ordained explicitly for it by the church. In this case one's ordination is the general one of baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. So one may even preach and teach the Word in the church without a second, special ordination by the church. (I Cor. 14:26-33.) Therefore, the early church practiced an ordination that did not divide the church membership into ministry and laity.

The question presses, then: Why are some ordained and not others? In I Cor., ch. 14, Paul gives us one of the rare New Testament glimpses of what went on at a gathering of a local congregation in the early church. This passage by itself would seem to suggest that there were no ministerial distinctions among the people of the church. From vs. 26-32, it would appear that anyone, on occasion, might have the power to speak in tongues, to prophesy, or to have a revelation. From this description, the gathering would seem to resemble very much a Quaker meeting, except that there was more trouble in preserving silence than in getting someone to speak. However, already in I Cor., ch. 12, Paul has made it abundantly clear that not all are prophets, or teachers, etc. But by the gift of the Spirit, each has his own contribution to make "for the common good." And how is each person's gift determined? Do we take the individual's own conviction or sense of calling at face value? Yes, it is taken seriously. But there is also the empirical test of his ability to deliver consistently, the evidence of his native capacities. These comprise the aforementioned "private call" and "providential call."

What, then, of the "ecclesiastical call"? Does the church have anything to say about which ministry an individual will fulfill in the church, or is this a matter strictly between him and God? In I Cor., ch. 14, Paul also speaks to this question: "The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. . . . If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. If any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized" (vs. 32-33, 37-38). In these words, Paul, who so stressed the immediacy of the power of the Spirit, also recognizes the need for "subjection to the brethren." This subjection is not to a legal, external authority, imposed from above by an individual or

group. It is subjection to the spiritual wisdom of the whole because it is the church as a whole that is the body of Christ, the dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Finally, however, this subjection to the mind of Christ as possessed by the church must take external form in concrete actions. So the one who is to fulfill the role and ministry of a prophet, or a spiritual, must receive *recognition* as such by the brethren. Even Paul, who dogmatically based his apostleship on no one else's say-so ("I did not receive it from man" Gal. 1:12), after fourteen years of preaching "went up again to Jerusalem . . . , and I laid before them . . . the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, *lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain*" (Gal. 2:1-2).

So the division of labor in the church is rooted in the divine mystery of God's calling in Christ, and the subjection to the brethren is rooted in the divine mystery of God's presence in the Spirit. But this profound mystery of the one body with varieties of ministry also has its practical, observable meaning in the area of human relations. God in Christ has given the varied ministries so that the church "upbuilds itself in love" (Eph. 4:16), "for the common good" (I Cor. 12:7), "that there may be no discord in the body" (I Cor. 12:25). And those who claim the various ministries must seek the recognition of the brethren because "all things should be done decently and in order" (I Cor. 14:40).

It would seem, then, that ordination by the laying on of hands was, in the early church, a formalized mode both of the church's act of recognition and of the individual's act of subjection. But there was no uniformity as to what function was being recognized by the church or subjected to the church. Sometimes it was an unspecified "gift of God" as in Timothy's case (I Tim. 4:14; II Tim. 1:6), although Timothy's role as a preacher and teacher may have been in view.

Sometimes it was a general task, as in the case of the Seven who were appointed to care for the physical needs of the poor (Acts 6:6). Sometimes it was a special task or mission, as with Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:3). Moreover, the evidence does not support the thesis that the early church universally used this formalized mode of ordination for the exact same types of functions, everywhere and all the time. It was a practice loosely used when the church felt the need of pouring all its spiritual power and authority into a task, or when the church wanted to guarantee that things would be done "decently and in order." This ordination clearly did not divide the church into two distinct classes, the clergy and the laity.

The most that can be said is that this formal act marked a relative and shifting line in the judgment of the church as to the *scope of impact* that a general office or a specific task would have in the life of the church. In other words, if this *scope of impact* at any particular time or place were judged to be sufficiently great, then the church would express its concern and control by the laying on of hands, by this formal mode of empowering and recognition. According to such a principle, the church would not necessarily use ordination for the same offices or tasks throughout its history. For example, just because the early church ordained deacons to care for the poor, this does not mean that the church must or should preserve this ordained office in perpetuity. When the conditions that gave rise to the office have disappeared, or when the poor are taken care of in less formal or in different ways, it is highly artificial for the church to continue ordaining deacons. And the attempt to add other tasks to the office in order to dignify it and to justify the use of ordination indicates a basic misunderstanding of the meaning of ordination. The very fluidity of the New Testament practice proves

the element of relativity in its theory, and explains the bewildering variety of applications of ordination in the history of the church. The medieval development of a theology of ordination that absolutized and finalized definite forms and meanings of ordination must be judged to have been a serious mistake. And the church today must be ready to reform as the grace of God in Christ and the providence of God in history call for a shattering of old forms and the creation of new ones.

Again, the function of the teaching ministry in the contemporary church provides a good example of the confusion on the issue of ordination, and of the impossibility of differentiating between clergy and laity by ordination. In one particular denomination, the seminary-trained and ordained minister of the gospel, who is installed as pastor of a congregation, still is recognized as having the primary responsibility for the teaching of the Word. But many local churches are now hiring a second such minister of the gospel and designating him as "minister of education." Usually, he has had no special training for this task. But there are not enough such ministers to supply the demand, or they cost too much. So this denomination also provides seminary-based training with a different curriculum for others (mostly women) who can be hired for the educational work of the churches. The latter are not ordained and are called directors rather than ministers of Christian education. Some years ago it was recognized that these directors were just as professional in the work of the church as ministers, and that their work has a broad and deep *scope of impact*. But this denomination, working on the principle that there is but *one* ministry in the church, could not bring itself to ordain the directors. So a new ritual of recognition and a new title were devised: the ritual of commissioning and the title of Commissioned

Church Worker. To complicate matters still further, the need for help in the educational program of the church has increased so rapidly that recently this denomination has decided to recognize formally still another (lower) grade of professional worker. He is to be called Certified Church Educator and need have only specialized college training. Further complications are these: The minister of education is a voting member of the ruling church court but often is not "installed" in the church, and so has little security. The commissioned director cannot be a voting member because she is not ordained, yet she is "installed" in her job in the local church and hence has security. The minister of education can also preach, administer the sacraments, and perform marriages; the director cannot. To completely confuse the whole picture, the same denomination recognizes the office of a lay preacher who is not ordained, and also has laymen as elders and deacons who are ordained, but not to the gospel ministry.

The point to this extended illustration is this: trying to hold on to an ordination that is archaic in both theory and practice, this denomination finds itself entangled in several hopeless contradictions. Its theory does not allow it to ordain people to a variety of ministries, and yet it feels forced to take under its wing of official recognition and control several forms of church service that have wide and important impact. Although committed to the doctrine of "the priesthood of all believers," its own practice of ordination perpetuates the clergy-laity distinction. Yet this distinction is losing its meaning as an increasingly large number of so-called laymen are working full time in church-directed services or vocations. This latter group does not include only the educators but also a host of people performing all sorts of highly technical and skilled services at every level and in every phase of

the church's life. Where the line between expert and layman is to be drawn in this membership is impossible to tell, except by the artificial and almost meaningless ritual of formal ordination.

It is high time that every Christian communion or denomination completely reformed its entire theory and practice of ordination. If the church is to retain this formal mode of recognition and control, then it must at least do the following: (1) practice ordination in a way that does not exalt one class of Christians to a qualitatively different rank, thus absolutizing the clergy-laity distinction; (2) recognize the variety of ministries in the church and that ordination will always apply to more than *one*; (3) leave it an open and relative question as to the extent of ordination among the various ministries, recognizing that the application will vary according to differing circumstances in the church and in the world that the church confronts. As noted above (p. 108), this reformation in the realm of ordination confronts many obstacles and grave, complex problems. In the sphere of official doctrine and practice, there are some faint stirrings in this direction on the part of some major denominations. But long and sharp theological debate will certainly confront any concrete proposals for such reformation, among denominations of both Protestant and Catholic traditions, as well as in ecumenical organizations.

There is, moreover, a whole dimension in the phenomenon of the church's designation of some of its members as "clergy" that is not immediately or directly affected by change in official doctrine and ritual. It is a dimension buried in the basic consciousness of the church, and it will take "deep therapy" to disturb it seriously. Most Protestant denominations have built up over the years a firm image of the minister. As already noted, this image isolates the minister

from the lay congregation almost as much as does the Roman Catholic image of the priest. A number of forces have operated in the last twenty-five years to modify this image a little, but it strongly resists being shattered and reformed. Responsibility is on both sides. Many younger ministers today feel stifled by the common image and want desperately to break out of what they consider to be a prison of hypocrisy. But the people of the church will not let him out and consider it a sacrilege if "the reverend" begins to act as if he were a normal human being. On the other hand, many of the younger generations that have flooded into the church since the war are eager to accept the pastor into their whole life as one of themselves. But even younger ministers often have an image of what they are supposed to be, from youthful impressions, from seminary training, from the official form of ordination itself. And now they assert themselves as priest and bishop over the "ignorant" and "wicked" laymen, and they resent any violation of their "authority."

This whole discussion of the clergy-laity distinction began with the assertion that we must recognize that every church member is a minister of some kind, that every one has some form of grace from Christ to contribute "for the common good." We must shatter the image of the uninformed, illiterate, impotent layman. Otherwise, the church will be incapable of fulfilling its mission in the world today. But the reverse is just as true. If every member is a minister in the church, then we must cease referring to one group of members as ministers, or as comprising *the* ministry of the church. Indeed, they are ministers but just as all other members also are ministers. They are not qualitatively or personally different or unique; they are only *functionally* unique. But every other member is also functionally unique in that he shares in one or more forms of ministry that are not shared in by all

other members. Not everyone shares equally in every ministry, no one shares in every ministry, everyone shares more intensively in one or several ministries than in others.

When this view of the church's ministry is operative, then the membership cannot be divided into two self-conscious groups, "we" the ministers, and "they" the laity. There cannot be one class of active givers of grace and another of passive receivers. Everyone is a giver in at least one respect and a receiver from others in many respects. Thus it becomes unnecessary, or impossible, to find new terms to replace the old ones of "clergy" and "laity." If the participation of *all* in the church-directed ministries is taken seriously, then a multiple designation of this participation must be developed. There will be the pastoral ministry, which may or may not be combined with the preaching ministry; there will be the teaching ministry, the ministry of fellowship and mutual concern, the ministry of music, the ministry of administration, the ministry of money, the ministry of physical needs, the ministry of faith and hope and love. Those who fulfill a certain ministry may very well have to be brought together for training, for discussion, for planning program and strategy. But even in this case, this group of specialized "ministers" ought not to develop a we-they attitude. The special form of grace that they are given to minister is given for "us," the whole church. And they who minister it are as much in need of it as are all the others. So the one who ministers the Word in preaching or in the sacraments must realize that he is but one of the congregation to whom the Word is addressed by God. He is but another participant in the sacrament even as he fulfills the role as the minister of the sacrament.

The church, therefore, must shatter the traditional image of the pastoral minister as *the* minister. He no more has a peculiar and indelible stamp placed upon his soul or person

than any other Christian. He is a sinner before God just as every other member of the church. There is no other or higher standard of Christian behavior for him than that which obtains for every Christian. His life is no more "full time" for God and his Kingdom than that of any other one who has been called as a disciple of Christ. If it is possible for anyone to be a loyal disciple and still smoke, drink, dance, go to movies, play golf, marry, have children, own a house and car, belong to Rotary, take part in politics, participate in a community's social life, take a stand on social issues, etc., then it is just as possible for a Christian whose ministry is to be a pastor and preacher. If any or all of these activities are wrong for a pastor, they are equally wrong for every Christian. There can be no double standard if there is to be no two-fold division of the body of Christ into clergy and laity. Until this image of the minister is shattered, little progress will be made in shattering the image of the laity as a group of passive, irresponsible, second-rate Christians.

The development in Protestantism of the ministry as a special class of Christians of qualitatively different and superior holiness was inevitable, and must be understood if the church of today is to transcend it. The Reformation attacked the institution of the priesthood and the hierarchy of bishops, archbishops, and pope. Against it, the priesthood of all believers and the essential parity of all Christians before God were asserted. Yet the Reformers realized that the great mass of Christians, who had been so subservient to and dependent on the priests, had to be provided new spiritual resources in order to assume their new freedom and responsibilities. The means of grace by which spiritual maturity was to be realized were narrowly defined as "Word," "sacraments," and "prayer." And the trained, experienced, ordained minister became the authority and *ad-minister* of these means to the members of the local congregation. In its concern to make

sure that this task of education for spiritual maturity would get done and done well, the major stream of the Reformation neglected the very real insights of the congregational tradition of the medieval and Reformation brotherhoods. Such a neglect was inevitable and was dictated by the needs of the time, as demonstrated by the fact that the formless brotherhoods either took on some organizational structure of the church, or became stagnant and died out.

In the reformation of our day, however, the time is ripe for the church to realize the fruits of a broader conception of the means of grace from Christ. We must now see that the *whole life* of the congregation and denomination is the means through which Christ imparts his truth and life to his body, the church. Every member's ministry is a ministry of Christ's grace. And holiness does not inhere more in one ministry than in another. It is a simple fact that the holiness of the Spirit of God often dwells more richly in a member who performs some obscure, inarticulate ministry than in the one who ministers as pastor and preacher. In the end, we must see that no individual possesses true holiness as his own in his own person. We only share in the holiness of God as we are in the relation of servant and friend to him. And every sincere servant is as sacred and precious to God as every other. This view of the means of grace does not in the least mitigate the necessity and importance of the ministry of Word, sacrament, and worship in the life of the church. But this ministry must take its place along with all the others so that the church will make bodily growth by every joint and member with which it is supplied.

THE IDENTITY OF MISSION AND MINISTRY

The signs of the presence of the true church will, therefore, certainly include Word and sacraments, as designated by the

Reformers. But as Hendrik Kraemer has pointed out (pp. 131 ff.), this designation leaves out the most important sign: the awareness and fulfillment of the church's mission to the world, the ministry of reconciliation. We can now return to the point made at the beginning of our survey of the ways to human meaning, namely, the relation of the *being* or *nature* of the church to the *mission* or *purpose* of the church. Or, in still other terms, the distinction and relation between the church-directed ministries and the world-directed ministry. We have seen how the church-directed ministries have been provided by Christ as the means through which he continues to be present in his body, the church, and thus continues to impart human meaning to the divine mystery of God's election of a people to be his servant. The development of the meaning and forms of these church-directed ministries has been traced from their beginnings in the New Testament church, through the early centuries, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and into the contemporary scene. In the latter we have noted a trend toward the increased inclusion of the laity in the ministries of the church, and of the need for a radical reformation in the concept and practice of ordination of a clergy.

Now it is time to make clear that any radical reformation in the structure of the church-directed ministries, any possibility of eliminating the clergy-laity distinction, depends entirely upon a clarification of the structure of the church's world-directed ministry and the mode of its fulfillment in our contemporary, unique historical situation. The divine mystery of our election to fellowship with God in Jesus Christ attains only its first and immediate meaning in the experience of our own personal self-renewal and in the joys of living in the Christian community. If the meaning that election holds for the church ends there, then election will lose all its mean-

ing and will bring the curse of self-righteousness and hypocrisy. The true and ultimate meaning of the divine mystery of election is found in the sense of being given a mission to the whole wide world beyond the *koinōnia* ("community") of the church.

Precisely at this point, however, a basic confusion has perennially plagued both the practice and the doctrine of the church. Only today is God providing some signposts that may lead the church to greater clarity. The confusion has been this: the church has tended to equate its mission to the world with the function of its ministries for the building up the body of Christ, the church. In other words, the enlargement and maturation of the church itself is the mission of the church. The church is the goal of its own labors. The church is an end in itself. The church itself is the realm of God's Kingdom that he came to establish in Jesus Christ. So the mission of the church is to bring the whole world inside the church, or to turn the whole world into a Christian community. And this mission is to be accomplished through the traditional ministries of evangelizing, preaching, and teaching. At the turn of the century, it was fervently expected by the leaders of the missionary movement that the mission of Christianizing the world would be accomplished within a generation or two.

By now it is perfectly obvious that there has been an essential confusion in this view of the mission and ministry of the church. By the middle of the twentieth century it is clear to everyone that the world is neither going to be swallowed up by the church through evangelization, nor is it going to be transformed into the church by some kind of social gospel. On the other hand, the traditional view has assumed that the Christian community is the realm of the redeemed and the saved, and outside the church is the realm of the lost and

the damned. Confusion in the mind and program of the church is compounded when some members, trying to be consistent, write off the most of creation and the human race as lost, and conclude that the church is the narrow little circle of the privileged elect. Such a view, we have seen, is counter to the whole Biblical tradition and to the impulse of God's love in the hearts of Christians. The ultimate goal of God's salvation, and therefore the mission of the church, clearly transcends the little handful of men that God has called together in the fellowship of Christ in the church. Surely this concrete historical phenomenon that we call the church, puny in size and poor in quality, is not the total product of God's great act of creation and salvation! This would be a perfect case of the proverbial mountain giving birth to a mouse.

The general direction out of this confusion is being fumblingly pointed out by the church's revived interest in the laity as the spearhead of its mission to the world. The world that is to be touched and saved by the gospel of Christ is something more than the few converts who are brought to Christ by professional evangelists and preachers. We are beginning to realize that it is through the general membership of the church, which lives in the world, that the transforming power of God's saving act in Christ may be brought to bear on all life. Confusion remains as to the mission and ministry that is to be accomplished through this impact of the total church. Generally, it is still being defined in the same terms as the work of the church-directed ministries. The idea seems to be to turn every Christian into a preacher or evangelist so that through the massive attack the world may be won for Christ that much sooner. We say that this expectation still evidences essential confusion because the way in which the general membership of the church lives as Christians in the

world will never serve either to evangelize or to Christianize the world. This view of the mission or ministry of the laity comprises a foisting upon the whole membership of the church of a form of ministry (*diakonia*) that is one of the specialized church-directed ministries, and that depends upon gifts which the whole membership never has possessed, and never will.

The emphasis upon the function of the whole membership in the world points in the right direction, we have said. But what is that direction? The church must ask itself, Just what is God's purpose for the whole creation? Next, how is that purpose related to God's saving activity in Jesus Christ? Finally, what part or role does the church play in God's continuing activity by which he brings his purpose to pass on the ground of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? The answers to these questions will reveal that the *diakonia* ("ministry") of the church is twofold: the diversified *diakonia* directed toward building up the church, in which every member shares at least partially; and secondly, the single *diakonia* directed toward the reconciliation of the world, which is shared in equally by all members of the church as they live in and encounter the world. It now remains to analyze the structure and operation of this second, world-directed ministry of the church and to show how it is related to and yet distinct from the diversified ministries designed to create and maintain the elect *ekklēsia* of God.

THE CHURCH
FOR
THE WORLD

THE church does not exist for itself. It is not the final inclusive repository into which flows all of the creation that God considers worth saving. The church is God's servant (*diakonos*) for a larger purpose. It is the body of Christ through which he continues to be present. It is his agent with a task to perform, at his command and by the power of his Spirit. The church exists for one thing: to fulfill its mission, its calling under God. One day, when the special historical task of the church is completed, God's Kingdom or rule over all will be manifest. All creation will gladly sing the praises of God and live in his love. Then the church will give up its self-consciousness as a separate community of men with a unique life and task in the midst of the human race. It will lose its identity as it merges with the whole of God's renewed and perfected creation. So, within human history, the church must regard itself as "provisional, not definitive" (Kraemer, p. 127). It must cease being church-centered (self-centered) and become world-centered if it is to fulfill its ^{callings} sharing in the servant role of its Master,]

As obvious as it might seem, this unchurch will appear as utterly novel and of its membership. The majority of those into the churches since the late war have

ply for a new resource for meaning and fulfillment in their own personal lives. And Kraemer is largely right when he asserts that, even in its vast missionary and evangelistic programs, the church is primarily concerned with "its own increase and well-being" (p. 127). Herein the church of today is manifesting that same error which was so fatal to the life of ancient Israel. It is being assumed that the goodness and grace of God in Jesus Christ is meant for the members of the Christian community as an end in itself. There is little or no awareness that this special gift of grace imparts also a tremendous responsibility, a call to service. It is assumed that only the church, rather than the whole of creation, is the object of God's love. So, repeatedly, the congregations sing: "The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord. . . . From heaven he came and sought *her*, . . . and for *her* life he died."

This introversion in the church's understanding of its ministry and mission is no sign of deep spirituality and firm conviction. On the contrary, it is a clear expression of the central sin of selfish self-concern, with little of Christ's sacrificial compassion for the lost and lone. The lack of concern and relevance for the world actually serves as a cover for a deep-seated doubt that this is really God's world and that he rules and seeks to redeem all nations and all creatures, from the most insignificant inhabitant of earth to the farthest starry system. When it is truly the Spirit of God who draws, refashions, commands, and empowers the members of the Christian community, then they are impelled from within by that Spirit to live and to act according to that Spirit in all the conditions and events of this world, and so bring the redeeming power of the Creator to his whole creation. This central, driving, overruling sense of mission will be regained by the church only as it rediscovers and re-explores its second kind

of ministry (*diakonia*), which we have called world-directed.

Paul gives us a simple summary of this dimension of the church's life in his famous statement: "God . . . through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry [*diakonia*] of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, . . . and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (II Cor. 5:18-20). We have seen that the world is a hell of alienation: of man from God, of man from man, of man from himself. Man, in his search for acceptance, for togetherness, for maturity, proves that he does not have the resources within himself. So God takes the initiative and calls into being a special people, a handful of men whom he can carefully train and nourish in the true way of life. But instead of becoming the light of God's life to all the nations, this elect people and their history served to prepare the ground for the life of just one Jew, the unique man, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ ("anointed one") of God.

It is the Christian faith that in the life of this one man all of God's efforts to impart his truth and life, during the two thousand years from Abraham to the present time, came to fruition. All the strands of truth, all the scattered hopes and visions of this enlightened people, were drawn together in this One. Yet his life was more than a fruition. It could not have occurred except in the fertile ground of Israel's spiritual experience, but neither was it a natural product of that history. In him there was something unique, totally inexplicable and unexpected by his contemporaries — although it had been foretold in the dark and disconnected visions of the ancients. Here was no prophet who spoke for God; here God spoke for himself. Here was no priest who stood between God and men; here the encounter with a man proved to be

encounter with God. Here was no king who ruled by laws dictated by God or by "nature"; here was God present in the immediacy of his creative power to restore and to perfect, to heal and to save, in a word, to reconcile. And all in the form of condescension and accommodation to man's lowly and needy condition, the form of One who comes to serve, moved by the love of compassion.

It is the Christian faith that the life of Jesus of Nazareth was that point in history, and particularly in Jewish-Christian history, where God's powerful, gracious presence broke into the horizontal plane of human life in a unique and determinative form. So Jesus' life initiated a process of divine activity in history that will lead finally to the perfect reconciliation of the whole of God's creation. In his life, death, and resurrection this perfect reconciliation, this perfect salvation and fulfillment of human destiny, was already realized. Here, the Kingdom of God has come. That is to say, here God in all his truth and life came to rule and reign in human life. Here, in Jesus, God descended to the depths of human degradation; in his truth and Spirit he suffered the onslaught of all the temptations known to man, and bore the most intense spiritual and physical suffering that this depraved world can inflict. He finally suffered the complete alienation of betrayal by his friends, conviction of crime by his people, execution by the worldly Empire of Rome. In his faithful life, in his dedicated death, in his victorious resurrection, the perfect reign and rule of God became a reality in human experience in the "body" of mankind. The reconciliation of the world to God became an operative reality in human history through the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth.

The question of ultimate importance now becomes: How is the fulfillment of human destiny in Jesus Christ to be shared in by the rest of mankind? This is both the deepest

and the broadest question that Christian faith must perennially try to answer. It is deep because in the resurrection event Jesus stands with one foot on the earth and one foot in heaven. In the resurrection, Jesus stands on the borderline between, or unites in himself, the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal, the dependence of man and the freedom of God. How and when and where does any man share in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? The question is also broad because it must be answered not just for the handful of men who are drawn into the discipleship of Jesus. It must be answered also for all those of Israel who "died in faith, not having received what was promised" (Heb. 11:13, 39-40). Ultimately, it must be answered for that vast majority of mankind who have never been decisively encountered by God in the Hebrew-Christian revelation. And beyond this already dim periphery of our concern and understanding looms the mystery of the whole creation's sharing in this resurrection, in "the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:18-25).

Many aspects of these questions will remain mysteries for us in this life because we now perceive the ways of God only dimly. Other aspects will remain a matter of speculation for even the regenerate reason of the Christian. But as to the role to be played by the church, some clearer answers must be forthcoming. The confusion referred to at the close of the last chapter need not, must not, continue. This confusion as to the relation of God to the church, and of the church to the world, has led to all sorts of wrong theological positions and hence to perverted and fruitless programs.

Our question is this: How is the fulfillment of human destiny in Jesus Christ to be shared in by the rest of mankind? The key to the answer lies in the nature of the humanity of Jesus. He was no curious mutation, without precedence or

consequence, unique, single, isolated. Nor was his humanity an abstract, transcendent universal (idea or form) that mysteriously somehow included the whole of mankind. Neither was he regarded by God as a legal representative for the human race, whose righteousness could be transferred by legal declaration, while other men in actuality remain untouched and unchanged in the structure of their being and life. The record of Jesus' life, as derived from his contemporaries, clearly portrays him as a man among men. He was born of the flesh, of an ordinary Jewish girl; counted as the son of Joseph and therefore of the tribe of Judah; as such, he was a son of Israel (Jacob), the chosen people of God and the heirs of the covenant of promise made by God with Abraham; and Abraham's lineage (and therefore Jesus') is finally traced back to "Adam, the son of God" (Luke 3:38).

Jesus was not just a man, or "man," i.e., representative, or typical, or ideal, man. His contemporary disciples stress that he was a *historical* man. However unique and unrepeatable is God's act and God's presence in this man, yet God's act and presence in this man is related to the unique and unrepeatable events of Israel's history. It was God who brought this history into being in order to effect that milieu in "the fullness of time" which would produce that man in whom God would dwell and act. For our concern here, it is just as important to stress that Jesus' contemporaries saw his human life not only as the fulfillment of one historical process (Israel's) but also as the initiation of another—the history of the church, of what Paul called "the body of Christ." It is very misleading, if not downright erroneous, for some contemporary theologians to say, on this ground, that the church is "the continuation of the incarnation" (God in Jesus Christ). But it must be asserted that the church, the community of Jesus' disciples, is the continuing historical medium of

the presence and action of the incarnate, crucified, resurrected One.

So a tentative and partial answer to our question is this: Mankind as a whole will come to share in the fulfillment of human destiny as accomplished in Jesus Christ *through a historical process*. In the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus describes this process as "the coming of the kingdom of God." This coming has had its preparation in Abraham, Moses, and the prophets. It has had its initiation in his own life among men. It will develop and spread like light and leaven into all the world through the witness and work of his disciples. The coming of the Kingdom will have a final consummation when the work of the disciples is completed, and God in Christ will come again in all his glory. Paul likewise saw that a *historical process* was involved in God's fulfillment of his purpose for mankind. Paul did not use Jesus' language of the Kingdom but spoke of the same thing in terms of "salvation" and "reconciliation." Sometimes he speaks of this condition as having been accomplished in Jesus, sometimes as now being realized, and yet again as an event still to come.

Our main concern here is with that part of the process in which the community of Jesus' disciples, the church, has a role to play. Our emphasis on this phase does not in the least modify or mitigate the absoluteness of God's sovereign freedom in and responsibility for the entire process from beginning to end. Man does not save himself. Man does not reconcile the world. *But*, Jesus did call and train his disciples to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-14). The early church was convinced that they had the command of Jesus to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations," and the promise of Jesus, "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20). So Paul in-

sisted that God who came in Christ to reconcile the world to himself did not complete that work, but "gave us the ministry [service, agency] of reconciliation, . . . entrusting to us the message of reconciliation, . . . God making his appeal through us" (II Cor. 5:18-20). In the same vein, Jesus warned his disciples that they were to "take up my cross," and Paul spoke of completing "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Col. 1:24).

All of this clearly indicates that the poor, human, fallible community of men that we call the church is in historical continuity with the humanity of Jesus. It is the body in which God now dwells on earth and through which he now continues that work which he began in the human life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This judgment on the crucial role that the church plays in God's plan of reconciliation is not based on the church's human self-confidence or on the appearance that the church yields to the eyes of the world. Such grounds could only plunge the church into despair. This estimate is possible only on the ground of God's Word to the church and of Christ's use of the church beyond any human insight or expectation. This command and gift of such a crucial role must not result in a prideful claim to greatness and privilege by the church — or the church will be rejected by God as was ancient Israel. It must be humbly accepted as an ennobling but terrifying *service*, to be fulfilled with joy that is mixed with fear and trembling. Jesus warned that much is demanded from those to whom much is given. A Biblical scholar has noted that the early church's awareness of being indwelt by the Spirit of God always produced a compulsive sense of mission to the world. The gift of the Spirit was not for the church itself alone but for the world through the church.

There are those in the church today who would reduce to

almost nothing the historical role of the church in the saving, reconciling work of God. Some look back to the cross and resurrection of Christ and say it was all accomplished there. But why, then, did not God's final perfected Kingdom come "on earth as it is in heaven" on resurrection morning? Others look forward to the so-called Second Coming of Christ and insist that the Kingdom does not come at all until then. But why, then, the First Coming of Christ? The fears these people have concerning an undue exaltation of the church must be taken very seriously. They must not be allowed, however, to deter the church from a humble and sober seeking to understand what task God has assigned the church in his vast plan of reconciliation, and particularly what task he has for it to do in our unique, contemporary historical situation.

In the title of this book we have chosen to indicate the church's general task by describing the Christian community as "agents of reconciliation." Again it will be objected that the word "agent" assigns too much initiative to men and detracts from God's sovereignty. We would argue that "agent" is a better translation of *diakonos* than "minister" or "servant." "Agent" captures that paradoxical ambivalence of simultaneous dependence and responsibility which is characteristic of the whole Christian life and experience. The idea of a minister in political usage has the same characteristic, but the word in church usage is tied too closely to an ordained professional clergy. The concept of servant is so degraded in contemporary language as to make it unusable for the New Testament meaning. Jesus stresses, as already noted, that we are to serve as humble servants, but as *he* was a servant. This is not as a dumb, menial automaton that mechanically does what it is told. Rather, this servant is a responsible person to whom a task has been given to be performed with great agony and struggle of the spirit, in the midst of real and

dire temptations. And he understands the issues involved. For Jesus said, "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15.) Likewise, Paul on the one hand stresses that we live in Christ and Christ in us, to the point of a kind of mysticism. On the other hand, his letters are filled with exhortations to struggle, to fight, to grow, to improve, to press on, to *work*. The basic Hebrew root translated "to serve" means fundamentally "to work," to do the work that the Creator has assigned to his creature. So Paul can say, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God." And then he immediately adds, "who has qualified us to be ministers [*diakonoi*, "servants," "agents"] of a new covenant." (II Cor. 3:5-6.)

It will also be objected that the plural, "agents," is too individualistic. We have already explained at some length that the Christian life is also characterized by the ambivalence of corporateness and individuality. The Christian community is not an organism in which unique personality is submerged and lost, but where it is given the power and possibility for fullest self-realization. On the other hand, the individual Christian never becomes self-contained and independent of the body, the church, because it is the body of *Christ*, the only sufficient source of the life and truth of God. Therefore, assuming the corporateness of the Christian life as fundamental and inescapable, the plural of "agents" stresses that the ministry of reconciliation is a task given to church, to be performed and shared in by every single member of the body of Christ. It cannot be delegated to a small minority of ordained professional clergy. It cannot be accomplished simply by actions and declarations on the part of the official governing bodies and officers of the church. This kind of agency of

reconciliation, by being God's light and salt and leaven in the world, calls for the dedicated and responsible service of every Christian.

To sustain this thesis, the way in which every member participates as an agent of God's reconciling work must be analyzed in detail. But before this can be done, Christian confusion on another issue must be dispelled. It has been maintained throughout this work that the object of God's reconciling work is not just the church but the world. This thesis runs counter to so much of the traditional thinking of the church that it demands some justification and explanation. There is an ancient phrase in the church's doctrine that is being re-explored today: *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. It means, "Outside the church there is no salvation." It is supposedly rooted in the numerous New Testament passages that say, in one way or another, that there is no salvation except through faith in Jesus Christ. And since individual faith is inseparable from participation in the corporate body, the dictum follows. As noted at the close of the last chapter, a literalistic interpretation of this doctrine would infer that all non-Christians are doomed to damnation. So the ministry of reconciliation is then understood to consist of the conversion or Christianization of as much of the world as possible.

This crassly simplistic interpretation of the exclusivism of salvation by Christ must be flatly rejected in the contemporary historical scene. It may have served as the effective stimulus to move the church to its missionary task in one of its past historical periods, but in recent years it has caused untold perversion of the gospel message and utter confusion in the programs of church action. In the twentieth century, God is calling the church through a new historical situation to a new and deeper understanding of its role in God's reconciling activity.

One of the essential factors in this new understanding is an

emphasis on the universal scope of God's saving intent in Jesus Christ. The word "universal" has unhappy connotations for some people in the church. It recalls a doctrine, and even an organized denomination, according to which every human soul will eventually be saved, if not in this life, then in the life to come. To which many others in the church today would reply, "Is that bad?" Obviously, one who knows God's sovereign love in Christ could not say that it would be bad, but many contend that such a denouement to human history is highly unlikely and unrealistic—not in view of God's desire but in view of man's perversity.

The complexities and ambiguities of this issue have given rise to a number of very different formulations. One, which stressed the absolute sovereignty of God, proposed the doctrine of double-predestination according to which God, before Creation, foreordained some men for salvation and the rest for damnation. In violent reaction, universalism insisted that all will be saved, but its position was based more on human optimism than on trust in the special mercy of God in Jesus Christ. It proposed that all men are essentially good and that all religions and philosophies lead to the same end. A mediating position was also formulated and has held the major force in recent generations. It agrees that God desires the salvation of all, but insists that the only way men can be saved is by hearing the gospel of Christ preached to them and by responding in faith. Although this position has generated a lot of so-called missionary zeal to save men's souls, it has gradually withdrawn the church into almost complete isolation from, and irrelevance to, the whole man and his world.

During the twentieth century the church has gradually come to see that neither the optimism of the universalists nor the pessimism of the orthodox represent a truly Biblical, and

Christianly relevant, approach to the world. The church has been led into a new Christocentrism that reasserts the uniqueness and absoluteness of God in Christ as man's only Savior. At the same time, the church is now coming to realize that God the Savior who meets us in Christ is also God the Creator who seeks his lost creation, and who even now meets us and calls us to serve him in all the conditions and areas of life in this world. Above all, the new Biblical studies, which stand at the center of the revival of Christian faith and theology, have given a new perspective on this age-old dilemma of the church. Granted, the major emphasis of the New Testament materials falls on the nature of the faith encounter with God in Jesus Christ and on the ministry of the church to lead men to conversion by preaching the gospel. This emphasis was natural and necessary in an era when the matter of prime urgency was "the building up of the body of Christ," both quantitatively and qualitatively, so that it could survive the onslaught of both Jewish and pagan persecution. We should expect the New Testament writings, therefore, to be concerned primarily with what we have called the church-directed ministries.

Our attention is being drawn now, however, to another whole strain in the New Testament materials, representing another distinct even though muted concern of the early church. True to its Hebraic background and perspective, the first Christian community did not conceive of human fulfillment in strictly individualistic terms. The reconciling, renewing power of God in Christ does enable the full self-realization of each unique person, *but* in community, in society, in relationship. And for the Hebrew, the community of man is not just at the level of transcendent spirit or immaterial soul but is a community that involves the whole man and his needs and desires at every level of his being. Furthermore,

man is seen as integrated into a community that stretches from the small, close-knit, single household to the larger family or tribe, to the people or nation, to the family of nations and the whole human race, and then even on to include the animals and birds and fish and plants and earth and water and stars and heavens: the universe, the whole of God's creation.

We have already noted in an earlier chapter how God's reconciliation is envisioned in the Old Testament as inclusive of God, man, and nature. The same theme is preserved in the new, Christian understanding of God's actualization of that reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ. For Jesus, it is the same loving Father that clothes the lily of the field and feeds the birds of the air who also comes to deliver men from creaturely anxiety by imparting to them his Kingdom and righteousness (Matt. 6:25-33). Jesus also sees the consummation of God's reconciliation as a gathering of all the nations of mankind. Many from the north, south, east, and west will come to dwell in God's eternal Kingdom. Many who did not recognize the Lord's call as such but who fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, visited the sick and imprisoned, will hear his voice saying, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; . . . as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:31-46). And although Jesus deliberately limits his own work to the confines of the Jewish people in Palestine, he clearly foresees the world-wide scope of his disciples' mission. Before the consummation comes, "the gospel must first be preached to all nations" (Mark 13:10). In fact, according to John's Gospel, Jesus thought of his disciples as sharing in his work of cosmic redemption. "God so loved the *world* that he gave his only Son." (John 3:16.) "In the world you have tribula-

tion; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (Ch. 16:33.) "He who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father." (Ch. 14:12.) "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide." (Ch. 15:16.)

In Paul's writings, this theme of universal cosmic reconciliation is even more clearly spelled out. It was this man's labors that became, for the whole church, the very symbol and model for the church-directed ministries, for building up the body of Christ in both quantity and quality. He suffered everything and anything if happily his preaching of the gospel might be the means of leading men to a crucial encounter with God in Jesus Christ. His letters of exposition and exhortation became the primary materials for instruction in Christian maturity within the church. Nevertheless, it was this same apostle whose vision of the universal import of Jesus Christ sometimes burst the bounds of his imagination and the limitations of his language, and he could do nothing but halt in wordless wonder. Paul had an overwhelming passion for the church, "that the church might be presented before him [Christ] in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27). Yet his concern for the purity of the church was not because he conceived of it as an isolated, inbred, self-contained and self-satisfied collection of the redeemed elect. Election, for him, was unto "service" (*diakonia*). He exalted the church because it is called to abase itself by sharing in Christ's work as the "agent" (*diakonos*) of the reconciliation of the world.

In this vein he tells how God "destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ. . . . For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, accord-

ing to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:5, 9-10). The same theme is repeated in such passages as Eph. 1:19-23; Col. 1:15-29; Rom. 8:18-25. The phrase, "all things," which Paul uses again and again in these and other passages, is his term for the universe, the whole of God's creation.

How, then, does Paul understand the action of God in calling a handful of men to be his elect and thus rejecting all the rest? In some passages it would seem that Paul equates the elect with the saved, and the nonelect with the lost. But in his most direct and extended treatment of the subject in Rom., chs. 9 to 11, Paul does not fall into any such gross oversimplification. In these chapters, Paul makes clear that election and rejection are not to be understood as related directly to men's ultimate destiny of eternal reconciliation or alienation. Rather, election and rejection by God are purely *historical* categories, indicating whether or not men have been called to share in God's *historical* process of reconciliation. So Jacob was chosen and Esau rejected "though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call" (Rom. 9:11). Then Paul argues that the election of a few had not been for the purpose of restricting salvation but in order to universalize it (cf. ch. 11:11-12, 15, 25-26, 28, 31-32). Thus he concludes: "They have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may receive mercy. For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Vs. 31-33.)

This same kind of universalism is expressed by Paul when he compares Adam and Jesus. For example, "As one man's

trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men." (Rom. 5:18; also, I Cor. 15:22.) Or again we find it in his concept of the new covenant. Under the old covenant made by God through Abraham and Moses, Israel was very definitely the people with whom the covenant (the promises and demands) was made. They were forced by God's laws and acts to become a very exclusive people, rigidly and sharply set apart from all other peoples and nations. God appointed prophets after the model of Moses, priests from the tribe of Levi, and kings in the line of David, as mediators of this covenant. They literally stood between God and the people, speaking and ruling for God, and leading the people in the worship of God. In the new covenant established by God in Jesus Christ, there is no mediator except God himself who speaks, forgives, and rules for himself in Jesus Christ. The elect community is no longer a people in the sense of being segregated and isolated from the world. Rather, it is to be buried in the world, like a seed in the earth, to bear fruit, like leaven in a lump of dough, like a lamp in the middle of a room. This community is to go into all the world and sacrifice its life for the world, even as did its Lord. So the whole community is to be "a royal priesthood" (I Peter 2:9), to speak, to act, to sacrifice for God.

If, then, the whole elect community is called to be a priesthood, "ministers of a new covenant" (II Cor. 3:6), who are the *people* of the new covenant? In his answer, Paul displays a strikingly bold universalism: mankind. Not just the Jews, and not just the non-Jews (Gentiles). In one brief tremendous statement (Eph. 2:11 to 3:13) Paul strikes out all prideful provincialism and bigoted exclusivism from the being and calling of the elect community. Now the Gentiles who were "strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope

and without God in the world . . . have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, . . . that he might create in himself one new man [-kind] . . . and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross" (ch. 2:12-16) (cf. Marcus Barth, *The Broken Wall*; The Judson Press, 1959). This universal scope of God's reconciling work in Christ does not eliminate the need for an *ekklēsia*, a called "community," because God's reconciling work is a historical process, using the ministry of a historical community. So Paul seeks "to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that *through the church* the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" (ch. 3:9-10). This mission of the church does not make of it a people, distinguished and isolated from all other peoples by race, nationality, culture, economics, place, and independent sovereignty. The people for whom the church exists is the whole of mankind. The church stands with and for mankind as a servant in the midst of the human race. Its self-consciousness as the "called" of God is identical with its sense of being "sent" by God to be the minister, the agent, of reconciliation for the whole of God's creation.

It should scarcely need to be said that Paul's universalism did not anticipate that every last single individual man will share in God's ultimate and eternal reconciliation. Paul knew all too well, even in his own life, the constant threat of temptations that lead men away from the truth and light. He remembered the stubborn pride of his Pharisaism that in some people creates the will to conquer on their own or be destroyed. He met again and again the perverse human heart that accepts permanent alienation rather than humble itself in the acceptance of forgiveness from another and from God.

(what Jesus calls the “unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit”). Nevertheless, Paul did not identify the ultimately reconciled with the historically elect, or the permanently alienated with the historically nonelect. These are two quite different lines of division. Paul knew as well as Jesus that historically “many are called but few are chosen,” that the elect always comprise a minority of the human race. On the other hand, Paul’s vision of the ultimate unification of “all things” in Christ could mean only that mankind and creation “on the whole” (though not in its entirety) will share in God’s salvation. This relation of historical election and ultimate salvation raises many difficult problems, most of which cannot be dealt with here. But let it be said here, once and for all, that these problems are not to be resolved by ignoring or denying the pervasive universalism of the Biblical faith. Many have done so on the grounds of the delusion that they were thereby defending the justice and sovereignty of God, or out of fear that they otherwise would not be taking sin seriously enough. Karl Barth, the great Swiss theologian, has declared that it would scarcely be glorifying God to preach a wickedness of man that is superior to the grace of God. So it is better, he says, to run the risk of theological error by preaching “a quickening gospel . . . than to preach law that kills without this risk.” After all, the church is sent to bring “good news,” not bad news.

Chapter 7

JUDGMENT AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Now to return to our question: What role does the church play in God's work of reconciling the world in Jesus Christ? If the church is not to be isolated in a promised land safe from the wickedness of the world, if the church lives in and for the world, even though possessing a truth and life that is not of this world, if the world "on the whole" is to be saved in the end anyway — what, then, is there for the church to do? If everything has not already been accomplished back there in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, or if everything does not await accomplishment at the end when he comes again, then what precisely is the task that has been assigned to the church in the meantime? Is there anything to do but wait? If that is all, then why must there be an ecclesiastical community at all? These seem to be very pertinent questions to some, especially in the light of the fact that in two thousand years the church has barely been able to scratch the surface in the task of converting the world to Christ, or in the program of Christianizing the social-political-economic order. Is not the idea of the church's being "sent," of having a "mission," of being an "agent" for the reconciliation of the world, a fantastic illusion? Does not this conception of the church complicate the relation of the church to the world beyond any possibility of comprehension? The appeal of the

traditional doctrine, *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, has been that it simplified the work and meaning of the church to a black-and-white issue, and it brought the program of the church under easy definition and control. Precisely! This phrase and all the doctrines that accompany it wrest the whole work of reconciliation from the hands of God and deliver it to the power and control of a human worldly institution.

The uncertainty and confusion concerning the mission of the church is largely the result of the lack of the proper *historical* perspective on the nature of God's activity for the realization of that destiny which he has assigned to mankind and his world. Within this saving work, the relation between church and world has too often been conceived in static terms. The church has been regarded as the realm of redemption, destined for eternal life, whereas the world is the kingdom of the devil, destined for damnation. If God is to do anything to or for the world, this act will come only at the end. The life and work of the church has nothing to do with it. So no integral, dynamic relation has been seen or asserted between the ingathering of converts by the church and the ultimate universal victory of God. In the practical, everyday teaching and program of the church, these two factors of reconciliation have been isolated. God's concern for and relation to the universe as a whole has become largely a matter of theoretical speculation on the part of theological specialists. The working, living church busies itself with the "care and nurture of souls," that is, with the personality development of its own members.

It must be emphasized that the church has not always been satisfied with this view of things. In the first few centuries of the Christian era there were those in the Eastern section of the church who regarded Jesus as a kind of injection of the

healing life of God into a sick world, which would be gradually restored as the "medicine" spread throughout the body of mankind and of creation. At the beginning of the fifth century, Augustine attempted a monumental analysis of God's way in human history, but the imminent collapse of the Roman Empire gave his whole work a pessimistic tone as to what the City of God might do for the city of man. In the Middle Ages there was a visionary construction, reaching its height in Thomas Aquinas, of a synthesis of the whole of reality, from lowest inorganic matter to the ethereal Spirit of God. But in the end the deeply rooted contrast between the darkness of this world and the brightness of the other world beyond the grave dominated the piety of the average Christian and of the practices of the church. In the Reformation, this dualism was not completely repudiated, but a valiant attempt was made to assert the sovereignty of God over both the state and the whole of the individual's life. In Lutheranism, however, this emphasis led to the divine independence of the state, so that the church did not gain a sense of dynamic responsibility for it. In Calvinism, the individual's practice of the Lordship of Christ finally came down to an obedience to a set of static, restrictive, moral injunctions as the best possible course in the worst possible world. Finally, out of nineteenth-century liberalism there developed a social gospel that earnestly but overoptimistically worked and hoped for the Christianization of the whole social order.

None of these constructions, however, could be said to have been formulated on the basis of a broad and realistic philosophy of history. Their view of the coming of God's Kingdom has been either too immediate or too futuristic. None of them have been able to delineate a significant contributory connection between the life of the church and the transcendent inclusive plan of God's universal salvation.

Only in the twentieth century has Western man, under the impact of Christian ideas, tried to develop a truly historical sense. In this context, Christian theology has recaptured the historical self-awareness of the ancient Hebrews and is seeking to understand the being and calling, the nature and mission, of the church in terms of its being a vital factor in the sweep of human history. In this way the church can recapture a sense of ultimate significance while being delivered from all pride and hypocrisy.

Again our question: What precisely is it that the church does that causes Christians to be agents of reconciliation? If the conversion of a handful of the human race "is too light a thing" (Isa. 49:6) for God to be interested in, and if the actual "building the kingdom on earth" is too great a thing for weak and fallible men, how is it to be conceived that the church is the vessel, the medium, the active responsible agent of God's reconciliation of the whole world unto himself?

The answer proposed here may be summarized as follows. The world, apart from Christ, is not totally devoid of God's truth and life. If it were, it would collapse into nothingness. Nevertheless, this truth and life are like the broken and shattered rays of the sun that force their way through a shifting mass of dark clouds—impotent to bring the seeds of the earth to fruition and harvest. This truth and life are so incomplete and so mixed with error that they are easy prey to the corruptive influence of human perversion. The highest and purest of human visions are immediately subjected to a process of degeneration that makes them incapable of diverting the line of human history from its monotonous and discouraging cycle of superstitious, mean, and vicious behavior. Follow, for example, the meteoric rise and tragic demise of the Confucian ethic, the Buddhist way, the Zoroastrian battle for the good, Platonic idealism. Seen in long historical perspec-

tive, these bright heights of human greatness blend with the dark valleys of barbarism and together form a dull, gray picture of unrelieved tragedy. Into such a setting, God will not come to dwell and to share the fullness of his goodness and life with his creatures. So alienation and estrangement continue. Reconciliation is an impossibility. What God demands is not perfection. He knows of what he made his creatures, that they are weak and fallible. He does demand two things of his creatures if they are to live in his presence — truth and love. Or in more human terms — honesty and compassion. So the full reconciliation of the created with its Creator will come only when the pure light of God's truth strikes into this world and rends asunder its murk of gray half-truth. But if this light is to bring reconciliation instead of destruction, it must shine with the warmth of love. And before the consummation of divine desire and human longing will come, this light of truth spoken in love (Eph. 4:15) must be shed across the whole face of the earth, and in every spot it must penetrate into all the secret nooks and crannies of the hidden motivations of the human heart, and onto every level of social organization.

This loving light of God's truth has broken into the world in Jesus Christ. It is making its way "into all the world" through his body, the church. It is not the duty of the church to *be* that light. (Impossible! Man cannot be God!) It is not the church's mission to demand or to expect that the world will perfectly abide by that light. (Thank God! Even the church cannot do that!) All that the church is called upon to do is to be the "servant" (*diakonos*) of that Light, to be the medium or agent through which the shattering truth of God encounters mankind and his world, an encounter made with the transforming power of ultimate compassion and concern.

With what result? This is the crucial question. What good does such an encounter accomplish? What should the church expect to happen? If it is something more than the conversion of a few but something less than the perfection of human nature and society, what is it? How can the church's witness to the truth of God be construed as a ministry of reconciliation for all the world?

According to the New Testament, the presence of the church in the world has a double impact and effect (beyond that of conversion of individuals to faith in Christ). The two sides of the impact may be indicated by two Greek words, *krisis* and *paraklēsis*, roughly translated as "judgment" and "encouragement." This means that wherever the light of God's truth and love shines, two things happen. And these two things can never be separated because neither one can occur properly without the other. On the one hand, man comes to see that he is living in an illusionary world of his own construction, a world of deceit, arrogance, lust, and so finally of despair. His life is brought into judgment. On the other hand, there is revealed beneath these layers of illusion the continuing goodness and promise of mankind as God's creation. Man's life is also affirmed. It is imperative that, in every enactment of its mission, the church brings into play both of these powers of the gospel. If the gospel is brought to bear only in judgment, then men will simply be driven farther into despair. If the gospel simply affirms man in his goodness, then he will be led farther into the falseness of his arrogance. This is such a crucial point concerning the impact of the Christian message upon the world that a closer look at the Biblical expression of these two themes is demanded.

The power of Jesus' life to produce "judgment" or "crisis" in man's life is specifically developed in John's

Gospel. In fact, the author gives the idea a unique twist that has generally escaped notice (but cf. Bultmann and C. H. Dodd). He does use the Greek noun *krisis* and verb *krinein* in their secondary sense of "condemnation" when he asserts that Jesus has come not to judge or condemn the world but to save it (John 3:17 ff.; 12:46 ff.). However, this idea of judgment as condemnation with the infliction of punishment does not express the richness of John's use of the concept of crisis to interpret the impact of the life of Jesus upon the world. Although denying that God sent Jesus to condemn the world, John asserts that the coming of Jesus does result in a kind of judgment (crisis), both now (ch. 3:18) and in the future (ch. 12:48). The meaning of this paradox would seem to be that Jesus does not *pass* judgment but that the shining of the light of his life into the world *brings* judgment (crisis). The nature of this crisis is best indicated by the root meaning of the Greek verb *krinein*, "to distinguish," and of the noun *krisis*, "decision." Man on his own lies immobilized in the gray fog of his ignorance and perversity. He does not possess adequate light to show him the way to fulfillment, and he lacks the will to follow what little light he has. What man needs first of all is the power of judgment in the sense of discernment, the ability to distinguish what is for his good and what is for his ill. Then what man needs last of all is the power of decision for the good.

In keeping with these ideas, John repeatedly uses the themes of light and darkness, of life and death, of truth and evil (the lie), to interpret the meaning of God's act toward the world in Jesus Christ. This note is struck in the prologue of the Gospel (John 1:1-18) and is played upon in many variations throughout. In Jesus "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us," and in this Word "was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and

the darkness has not overcome it." The result or impact of this inbreak of God's light is "crisis": the discernment or separation of evil men from true men, of evil deeds from true deeds. This discernment becomes apparent through the decision of response by men to the Light as he shines into their lives. (Chs. 3:19-21; 12:46.) "He who does what is true" is encouraged and enabled to come to the Light because in Him is encountered not the condemnation but the love of God (ch. 3:16). And God's love and man's response embraces not just some ethereal "soul" but the whole man, his "world." (Chs. 3:16-17; 12:47.) The "life" that has entered the world through Jesus, and that is promised to all, is not some empty "immortality of the soul" but the resurrection of the whole man and his world.

It is being proposed here that this whole complex of ideas is meant by John as a way of understanding not only the unique life of Jesus Christ but also the life and mission of his disciples, the church. John's Gospel is clearer than the other three concerning Jesus' expectations and plans for the continuation of his work through his disciples. Chapters 13 to 16 may be regarded as an extended dissertation on this subject — a subject that mystified Jesus' disciples because, like all other Jews, they expected the Messiah to establish God's Kingdom all at once in one overwhelming display of divine sovereignty. In these chapters, John reveals that Jesus' whole life was dedicated to the task of preparing a handful of disciples who would be the medium of his light into all the world. Even his death is to their advantage because then he can send the Spirit who will empower them to even greater works. (Chs. 16:7; 14:12-17.) So now at the end he sends them into the world even as he had been sent into the world. (Ch. 17:15-18.) This can only mean that they are what Paul calls "the body of Christ," and that through this body of dis-

ciples God in Christ will continue his process of judgment (crisis) in the world until the time is ripe for the final crisis when the Kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven.

However, God did not merely bring the world of man to *judgment* through Jesus Christ. The light of God's truth and love and goodness does indeed enable man to see that he has been living in the darkness of deceit, of arrogance, of lust, and therefore in despair and death. But it does something more. The light of Jesus' life also reveals the fact that this desperate man — so forcefully portrayed in contemporary literature — is not true man. Christian faith not only foresees some hopeful future for this man in life beyond death; it also sees here and now in lost man himself the good creation of God, undestroyed by its enslavement to sin and death. And Christian faith joyously acknowledges that, quite apart from the Christian religion, this goodness breaks out and manifests itself in human existence at different times and places under God's providential care of all men. But the ultimate uniqueness of the life of Jesus Christ lies in its power to affirm, to call forth, and to bring to fulfillment man's creaturely potentiality with unparalleled clarity, force, and finality. Therefore, if the church truly participates in the will and purpose of Christ, its life in the world must not only bring "judgment" to pass but must simultaneously and vigorously engage in the work of the affirmation and encouragement of the truly human in all the ways and deeds of men.

It is of real moment that this emphasis is also to be found in John's Gospel. The whole Gospel requires both dimensions. We noted above that in John, chs. 14 to 16, Jesus instructs his disciples that they are to be sent into the world to do his work. And they are to be empowered to do so by the presence of his Spirit (God's Spirit, Holy Spirit) with them.

Paul also describes the essence of the Christian life as a living and walking by the Spirit. (Gal. 5:25.) And what does the presence of Spirit do? John attempts to capture the whole richness and depth of the meaning of "Spirit" in one synonym, "Paraclete" (John 14:16, 26; 16:7). The King James Version translated this as "comforter," the RSV as "counselor." Neither of these words carry the full force of the term. The Greek verb basically means to appeal, to encourage, to exhort, to arouse. *Paraklēsis*, then, is a compelling, urging, compassionate encouragement, a saving affirmation. Beyond the bringing of "judgment," this is the dominant impact of Christ's presence on his followers, and this is to be the characteristic note sounded in all the relations of Christians with the whole world of mankind in which they live. As God has made his appeal and encouragement toward us in Jesus Christ, so now Christ makes his appeal to all mankind through us (II Cor. 5:20). Or as Paul also wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all *encouragement*, who *encourages* us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to *encourage* those who are in any affliction, with the *encouragement* with which we ourselves are *encouraged* by God." (II Cor. 1:3 f.; with "encourage" in place of the RSV "comfort.")

What are the grounds of such encouragement? What makes it possible? And what is being encouraged? Christians know that God is the only *source* of encouragement and hope for man. And they know that Jesus Christ alone is the ultimately dependable and effective mediator of God's encouragement. So Paul wrote to the church at Philippi: "If there is any encouragement [*paraklēsis*] in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind,

having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. . . . Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 2:1-2, 5.) But there is another ground that makes this human life of love and accord possible: the nature of man himself in his fundamental undestroyed character as creature in the image of God. The light of God's truth in Jesus' life does reveal in "judgment" that this creaturely potentiality of man has been perverted and subverted to the point of impotence. At the same time God's truth and love appeals to, calls forth, arouses, affirms, and encourages this hidden and lost true humanity that still exists as God's good creation. Man's "world" that the New Testament so often disparages is no created and permanent reality. It is a world of illusion because man has made finite creaturely things the ultimate criterion of his life instead of the eternal spiritual world of the Creator. This lie, this illusion, has set loose corruptive forces of evil, but they have neither invalidated nor destroyed men's God-given potentiality as creatures in God's image, destined to live in freedom and love. This true humanity has finally appeared in Jesus of Nazareth. By the unique presence of God with him, he was able to live in the midst and under the full weight of man's illusory world, and yet to overcome it. And now from his life, his Spirit streams out into all the world, through his followers, calling, affirming, encouraging the goodness of God's creation to arise out of the hidden depths of all mankind. This call is to be sounded by Christians in every sphere and level of human existence. And they are hopefully and joyously to expect and to welcome evidences of response on the part of all God's children, whether Christian or not.

This final point raises the crucial issue concerning the universality of the Christian mission. Both the "judgment" and the "encouragement" brought about by Christian wit-

ness have usually been assumed to lead to one end: conversion. Does a man accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior or not? So the "witness" (*martyria*—another favorite word of John's Gospel) has been assumed to be the verbal proclamation of Christ's call to discipleship. Such would seem to be the general understanding of the New Testament. We would expect this proclamation and conversion to be the major immediate concern of the church because this brand-new phenomenon in human history had first of all to establish and to defend itself against rabid hostility from every angle. The body of Christ had to be concerned with its own growth and spread if it were to attain size and strength adequate for any significant impact upon human history. Nevertheless, it is a serious error of interpretation to assume that this self-concern was the only concern of the early church.

It is perfectly obvious, even to the secular historian, that the results of the "judgment" and "encouragement" which the witness of the life of the Christian community injected into the life stream of humanity far outstripped the rather limited phenomenon of self-conscious conversion to Christian discipleship. A ferment had been let loose in history that "turned the world upside down" wherever it spread. As a result, millions of individuals, whole nations, races, and cultures have been compelled to make decisions, even though often completely unaware of the source of the ferment, and even though their active responses could hardly be recognized as even approximations to the truth of the "Christian way."

This must be the clue to the hidden connection between the narrow Christocentrism and the inclusive universalism in the mind of the early church. To put it in the language of the Gospels, the intensive Christ-centered faith of the disci-

ples sets loose into humanity a leavenlike ferment that brings humans in their history into ever-widening and deepening moments of crisis and possibility. These moments form a chain or process that draws an ever sharper line between truth and evil, until one final crisis is called forth when God will come to complete the reconciliation and fulfillment of all creation.

For the church to view its calling and mission in these terms demands great trust in God. It must have the same faith that Jesus had when he faced the utter desolation of the cross. In spite of all appearances to the contrary, Jesus had to trust that God had not deserted him, and that out of his death and defeat God would bring life and victory. At the beginning of this section we noted that the church has always been tempted to define its mission in a way that brings it completely within the grasp and ability of the institution. If that mission is simply to make converts, techniques can be developed and the results counted. The "success" of the church, though small, is guaranteed and assured. If the task is to "Christianize" society, crusades against wickedness can be launched and good Christian men run for public office. The results may not be exactly the Kingdom of God, but the battle can be made concrete and exciting, at least for a time. In neither case, however, can the results be equated with the universal scope of God's victory in Christ as clearly envisioned by the New Testament church.

The first Christian community understood that it was not destined to become great in the eyes of the world, or to rule the world in the ways of the world. Those Christians knew that they could expect no other way of life than their Lord had, the way of the cross. They knew that the only weapons they had to fight with were those which Jesus used: the word of truth and the act of love. When the church follows in this

Way and lives by this Spirit, it can be sustained only by faith, that is, by trust in God beyond what the naked eye can see and what natural reason can know. It would be much easier if the church could simply hoard its God-given seed of truth and love within itself and for itself, but Jesus castigated such a one as a “wicked and slothful servant” (Matt. 25:24-30). It would be much more reassuring if the church were allowed also to be the harvester of the fruits of its labors. Too often the church has coveted the task of making the final judgment and desired the credit for bringing the perfect Kingdom. God alone is Lord of the harvest (Matt. 13:24-30), and he alone can read the secrets of men’s hearts and decide their proper destiny (Matt. 25:31-46). God gives the seed, God reaps the harvest, and man has no power or claim in either case. However, it is the unique and indispensable task of his servants, his agents (*diakonoi*), to scatter and to plant that seed in every furrow of human life and existence, across the whole field of human habitation and history. The church is neither the source nor the end of the process of reconciliation of the world, but it is the crucial link in between. It is even that crucial link, not in its own right or its own power, but because it is the body of Christ, the medium, the servant, the agent of the Spirit of God.

There are innumerable implications and illustrations of the view of the church and its mission as stated in this chapter. Only a few can be given here. Of greatest import for our general theme of the church’s ministry (*diakonia*) are the corollaries of the thesis that the ministry of reconciliation is accomplished by the whole Christian community as its members live and act in every walk of life in the world. This means that every Christian is a priest, or minister, or agent, through whom the Spirit of God is making his impact upon the world and thereby bringing the world into crisis. Wher-

ever a Christian lives and whatever is his work or vocation, there God calls him to be the medium through whom his truth and love and life may break through the fog of human deceit, exploitation, and enslavement. Every Christian is employed (by God) in "full-time Christian service" (*diakonia*), just as truly as the preacher within the church. Every kind of work at any spot on the earth is a Christian vocation, because every level and phase of human existence is infected and corrupted by deceit and perversity, and so stands in need of that crisis which may lead to the freedom of truth and the power of love. Before the reconciliation of the whole world will come, the whole world must be brought into crisis and encouragement. There is no village so small and remote, nor any aspect of life so insignificant and mean, that it can escape the concern and the compassion of God. The "whole world" refers not only to the horizontal spread of humanity over the face of the earth but also to the perpendicular heights and depths of human society at any one place and time.

A few illustrations will, perhaps, help to clarify what is meant by this kind of Christian witness and the crisis and encouragement it effects. Let us consider first of all a generalized example that is applicable in many ways for all Christians. In order to show that this whole definition of the church's mission is not so bizarre as it might seem, we will quote this example at length from Karl Barth, one of the three or four outstanding theologians of the twentieth century. In discussing the law in the sense of the general ordering of church life, he raises the question as to whether the law or order of the Christian community can have any significance for the political, economic, and cultural order of human society in general (*Church Dogmatics* IV:2, pp. 719-726). His answer is that the church orders itself not for the sake of itself but for the sake of humanity. The church by

its very nature must converse with those outside, "and one way in which it has to do so is by showing them the law valid within it. To what end?" Not with the expectation that society will adopt church order, "not to ecclesiasticize the world." Rather, the Christian community knows that Jesus Christ is Lord both of the church and of the world, which knows him not. It is because of his secret Lordship that even in the world "some form of law is sought and found, in an attempted movement from worse to better. The community does not see in this a mere chaos of endlessly self-renewing human error and wrong. . . . And it knows that it is itself responsible for the fact that this way should be sought and found and traversed: not the way to the Kingdom of God, . . . but the way to better law, more serious order, more certain peace, more genuine freedom, and a more solid maintenance and fashioning of human life, and human life in society. If the community were to imagine that the reach of the sanctification of humanity accomplished in Jesus Christ were restricted to itself and the ingathering of believers, that it did not have corresponding effects 'outside the walls of the church,' it would be in flat contradiction to its own confession of its Lord. But if it accepts the fact, . . . it . . . will confidently if modestly undertake the task of contributing to the improvement of human law." It will do so with confidence that "this contribution will definitely not be in vain but will bear fruit within the limits which are set for all human action."

It is this kind of witness to Christ for the reconciliation of the world that every Christian can, inevitably does, make in the world. Wherever he lives, whatever he does, in every phase of his existence, the ordering of life that he knows in the work and worship of the church must find expression in the attitudes he assumes, the advice he gives, the spirit he

injects, in the deliberations and actions of the individuals and groups with which he is in vital relationship. It is not that the church attempts to make decisions for the world, but that the church must bring Christ's Spirit of truth and love to bear on all those who make the decisions. When the corporate church makes public declarations on McCarthyism, racial problems, the recognition of Red China, and the like, Christian witness is being made for the crisis of the world. But it is just as crucial for the crisis of the world when obscure, unknown Christians manifest this same Spirit in the councils of the local P.T.A., business firms, social clubs, town politics, and in the most personal relationships of family and friends. The truly significant stream of human history, of which political and military leaders are but expressions, is that flood of hidden, unchronicled events of the common life wherein the character of a people is formed, where the issues of spiritual slavery or freedom really matter and are finally determined. It is there that the host of Christians live and die, and it is there that they, the common members of the local church, must penetrate with the living Spirit of Christ. Only then will the gospel have been brought "to all the world," and only then will the world be readied for the final coming of God and his perfect life and rule.

To give concrete and public illustrations is always a questionable procedure because they are so controversial and open to such diverse interpretations. Nevertheless, several may be suggested, at least for purpose of discussion. It has been only a culture permeated by Christianity that has achieved such regard for the human person that slavery has been abolished and women have attained rights and recognition as individuals. When Paul arrived in Rome, there were more slaves than free men, and women were mere chattels for the most part. Again, there is nothing to compare in

all the other history of mankind with the depths and subtleties of the arts as exploited by the human spirit set free in the atmosphere of the Christian view of man and his world. There is also the remarkable argument of the British philosopher R. G. Collingwood to the effect that the natural sciences never attained their fantastic development and fruitfulness until they could operate within the cosmological view of the Christian doctrine of God as Creator. The notable thing about each of these examples is this: The great leaders in social reform, in the arts, and in the sciences have not always been Christians themselves. They have not always been very well treated or regarded by the officialdom of the church. The point is precisely that great transformations and redirections have taken place outside the church but in the atmosphere, and under the stimulus, of the Christian faith as it permeated a whole culture like leaven. And now the church finds itself being aroused and stimulated in return by the social idealism, the aesthetic revelations, the scientific insights, of the world it helped to set free and to reshape.

An even more concrete, and so more problematic, illustration may be found in Mohandas Gandhi. It has been reported that he once remarked that he believed the essentials of Christianity and Hinduism to be in accord, but that if he were conclusively convinced that Hinduism contradicted the teachings of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, he would have to hold to the latter. Whether apocryphal or not, this story indicates the admittedly strong influence of the New Testament on Gandhi. He was never converted. He never entered the fellowship of the Christian community. Yet this man became the voice that articulated for millions of people their longing for freedom and a new way of life. He was the pivot on which the history of a whole people took a radical turn. A similar impact of Christianity on the life of Japan

may be noted. As in India, the Christian community in Japan is an exceedingly small percentage of the total population, but the results of its witness have been felt by the whole nation. A leader in the Japanese church has recently given some striking examples of significant developments in the national life that never would have occurred except for Christian leadership and influence: the growth of labor unions for the welfare of the depressed classes; the injection of the concept of the person as a center of life and sacredness into Japanese philosophy, literature, and the arts; the raising of the general status of women, and their protection from abuse by such means as the antiprostitution laws.

It is being proposed here that these fruits of Christian witness are of ultimate importance in the historical process of God's saving work, that they are being used by him in ways completely beyond the ability of the church to assess. The crisis and encouragement that these transformed conditions create in men's lives have their own significance quite apart from the issues of conversion and the church's own inner life. For many people in the church, all the foregoing illustrations are very unsatisfactory examples of Christian witness. They provide no countable converts. They allow for no ecclesiastic control. They give no promise of Christian perfection or Kingdom ethic. Precisely! The ultimate issue of reconciliation and salvation of the world must be left in the hands of God. We are only servants (*diakonoi*), but servants who are friends of God, agents in whom and through whom his Spirit dwells and works to set loose a force of truth and love with power to transform and redirect human history far beyond our poor abilities to understand or to control. To be called as agents of his reconciliation is a wondrous but fearsome thing, and the temptation to exalt ourselves in splendid isolation must constantly be resisted. We must fol-

low first our Lord's own way of the cross before we can behold the crown of God's loving salvation of all mankind.

The temptation of exaltation exists, however, only for a handful of self-righteous pharisees and power-seeking egotists within the church. The most serious stumbling block in the way of fulfillment of the church's mission is simple unbelief. The majority of Christians are honest enough to recognize and to admit openly that their knowledge of the Bible and of Christian doctrine is hopelessly shallow, partial, and mixed up; that their participation in the life of the church is very marginal in their total activities; that their comprehension of Sunday morning worship and preaching is confused and uncertain; that their private prayer and devotion is practically nonexistent. They view their Christian faith as a whole, therefore, as something hesitant, tenuous, and impotent. They seriously doubt that their being Christian distinguishes them in any significant way from the sea of worldly paganism in which they are immersed. In the secret places of their hearts they wonder silently if Christianity really does heal their diseases of body, mind, and spirit. Does being a member of the church do them any good at all? If not, how can they as merely nominal Christians do the world any good? Where and when specifically have their lives been a witness to anything but their own greed and self-concern, their own ignorance and prejudice? How, then, even by the wildest stretch of the truth, can their lives be said to be the medium of God's love and truth, agents of reconciliation?

In some ways this is the most pressing question confronting the church today, because there is a widespread and growing conviction that the mission of the church to the world in our day will be fulfilled, if at all, through the witness of the lives of that 99 per cent of Christians traditionally called the laity. The central problem of the church today,

then, is not how to convert more persons to be laymen but how to help laymen to achieve that maturity of faith they need in order to be witnesses of God's truth and love. It is not the purpose of this present study to spell out a specific program for the achievement of such maturity. However, this uncertainty and immaturity of the average Christian will not be remedied apart from the solution of an entirely different set of problems that confront the church as it seeks to fulfill its mission of crisis and encouragement in the world. These problems must be honestly and openly acknowledged. Otherwise, the attempt to fulfill the mission as characterized in this chapter may well lead the church to an even deeper sense of defeat and disillusionment. On the other hand, a frank and frontal attack on these problems may turn out to be the best possible and even the only way for members of the church to regain a conviction of the reality and power of Christian faith. In our brief concluding chapter these problems can only be sketched in rough outline. As will be seen, their *solution* will never be written in a book but only worked out as they are explored concretely by groups of Christians drawn from all walks of life.

Chapter 8

THE WAY AHEAD

THE new directions in Christian understanding of the church's mission have filled many younger ministers and younger Christians with new vision and enthusiasm for Christ's cause in the world. But too hasty and too direct attempts at implementation have already brought confusion and even despair. In one church a group of business executives had a series of meetings that produced exciting discussions concerning the relations between their church worship and their worldly work. But they came to the "startling" conclusion that their worship had no connection with or impact upon their executive life. Actually, this result was more startling to the minister than to the businessmen. They had to admit that they did not really expect the church to have much relevance for the cultural scene. Most ministers continue to plug along anyway, and most members stay with the church because it's the "decent" thing to do. But considerable uneasiness was created by the publication of an article entitled "Why I Quit the Ministry" (*The Saturday Evening Post*, Nov. 17, 1962). This young man, just out of theological school, had a glowing image of what a congregation of Christians should be, in contrast to what he knew most congregations actually are. He conceived it to be *his* (the minister's) task "to correct the faults in the church."

His first year he tried to shift the leadership of the church but ran into "the clique who controlled" things. His second year he sought to "weed out ex-members" and, in his third year, to challenge the funeral customs of the community. But he found he was "hitting a blank wall" because "members refuse to care." So he quit.

Serious question marks must be placed beside this man's concept of the minister's task and the methods he used in trying to fulfill it. But the larger question mark that he placed beside the church as a whole cannot be easily erased. His experience, and that of the group of Christian businessmen, must be listened to with seriousness and open-mindedness by the whole church and by local congregations. A growing body of literature by informed and concerned leaders of the church is now spelling out the complex conditions that have given rise to this question mark. Innumerable conferences have been held and endless speeches, articles, and papers written in an attempt to probe the mission and ministry of the church in the unique conditions of our day. The Division of Studies Committee on Evangelism of the World Council of Churches has now mounted a worldwide high-powered study concerning "the missionary structure of the congregation." Some of the more widely read American books on the problem are: Peter Berger's *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies* (Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961), Gibson Winter's *The Suburban Captivity of the Church* (Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961), Martin Marty's *The New Shape of American Religion* (Harper & Brothers, 1960), Robert Spike's *In but Not of the World* (Association Press, 1957), George Webber's *God's Colony in Man's World* (Abingdon Press, 1960), Charles West's *Outside the Camp* (Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), Francis Ayres's *The Ministry of the Laity* (The Westminster Press, 1962), James

Gustafson's *Treasure in Earthen Vessels* (Harper & Brothers, 1961), and, incidentally, the first edition of the present book. There is a corresponding body of literature in Europe. Just a list of the writings during the last ten years in the general field of the nature and mission of the church would fill a good-sized book. Two of the most recent and stimulating works are John A. T. Robinson's *On Being the Church in the World* (The Westminster Press, 1960) and Gayraud Wilmore's *The Secular Relevance of the Church* (The Westminster Press, 1962).

The point to this bibliography is to encourage local congregations (not just ministers) to plunge into a radical study and an "agonizing reappraisal" of the nature and mission of the church. And this study must not be conducted only in the general theological terms of the present book, although some such general theological perspective as this book has tried to supply must inform more concrete analysis and implementation. Even the books listed above will not give the answers. They do state the problems with rugged honesty, scientific thoroughness, and passionate concern. But the real answers will be worked out where the whole membership of local congregations (including the preacher as trained theologian) attack the problem of reappraisal with vigor and directness. Only those Christians who are actively engaged in the diverse kinds and levels of worldly activity can help the church figure out what it means to bring the *krisis* and *paraklēsis*, the judgment and encouragement, of the gospel to bear on all of human life. The local congregation *can* be led by the preacher-theologian into such a total reappraisal. It has actually been done. And nothing can be more effective in producing the much-called-for "renewal of the church," in helping to envision "the way ahead," than such a study.

The major problems that will be encountered in such a study are already becoming clearly outlined in the above-listed literature. So this book will be brought to a close with the attempt to provide a rough road map to guide the average reader through the tortuous twists and turns, the dizzy peaks and dark valleys, that are to be met on the road ahead, according to the most sensitive critics of the church of our day.

The first major challenge the church must face up to is contained in the charge that it has lost its creative Christian freedom. It is accused of heeding the demands of self-seeking men rather than obeying the commands of the righteous and loving God. The church has therefore become enslaved to alien masters. According to the critics, this enslavement has taken place in at least four different levels of the church's life. (1) It has become enslaved in the simple physical fact of its location. The large bulk of the church's impressive membership rolls is made up of people who live in middle- or upper-class communities. Whether they are suburban, small town, or rural does not matter. Christians in these communities lead an isolated life. Although living in a day of universal mobility and instant communication, almost none of these Christians ever directly see or hear, let alone share in, the lives of the millions who still barely subsist in fear and desperation before the constant threats of hunger, disease, and violent death, without even a chance to fight their way out by hard work.

(2) This isolation of most of the church from the suffering world is intensified by another kind of isolation. Most Christians are also shut up within the life and program of their own local congregation. They are enslaved to the conduct and advancement of little more than the interests of their own particular little group of Christian friends. This

is so in spite of the fact that the congregation is a member of a denomination that has area, state, national, and even international organization, in spite of the fact that the denomination belongs to the National and World Councils of Churches. "Foreign missions" has lost its old romance, if not its very reason for being, while the Peace Corps and the foreign student exchange have absorbed the efforts of the handful still interested in the international scene. "Home missions" concentrates on the extension of self-supporting suburban churches. And the local Presbyterian congregation has no knowledge or interest in what is going on in the Baptist church down the block and vice versa.

(3) The church is said to be enslaved also in its role as the "bought" purveyor of the cultural *status quo*, whereas it should be the creative critic of the old and the prophet of a new and better society. The thesis is that the church is being paid and supported to encourage its members to believe that everything is "O.K." The "O.K. church" in an "O.K. world." As Berger has put it succinctly, "The social irrelevance of the religious institution is its functionality" (*The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*, p. 103). The church *functions* in its support of the going moral habits, economic aims and practices, social and psychological desires, and political commitments of its own constituents. Therefore it is *irrelevant* to the larger dynamic of the world's struggles and conflicts in search for a truly better way of life. Such a church can bring neither the judgment nor the encouragement that the gospel holds for lost and longing mankind. Rather, the Christian faith loses its sharp and distinctive contours. It yields its claim to uniqueness. What the church stands for becomes indistinguishable from the religion-in-general of the populace, and Christianity ends in sheer relativism, as just one of the ways that help men to live a good life.

(4) Finally, the church's yielding to the dominion of the general cultural ideology not only robs the church of its distinctive religious faith but also means that it absorbs what Marty calls the suburban "psychic make-up"—"genial and generous but still characterized by low-sight, narrow-gauge, small-bore visions." This means that the mind of the church is not only hostile toward the consideration of changes in social, economic, and political life. It means also that the church simply shuts its ears to every challenge that comes from the realms of science, philosophy, and the arts. The Christian who happens to be interested in these fields is therefore asked to be a split personality, keeping his religious and intellectual lives apart. This can result only in the impoverishment of the contemporary expressions of Christian faith. It has already led to the almost total alienation of the intellectual world from the church. Insofar as science, philosophy, and the arts need and desire a religious foundation, they are being forced to formulate it for themselves outside the perspectives of the Christian faith.

This analysis of four ways in which the church has lost creative Christian freedom and initiative in today's culture certainly does comprise a severe challenge to the thesis that the general membership of that church is called to be the agent of God's reconciliation to the world. It can be argued, in truth, that radical and noteworthy exceptions can be specified in which some Christians and some churches are putting the lie to the four critiques described above. Just a brief description of the variety and number of the exceptions would fill another book. It can also be pointed out that few of the critics of the suburban way of life seriously want mankind to forego the material advantages of that life. In fact, the content of the "social justice" that they want for the slum dweller is pictured rather much in terms of those ad-

vantages. And after all, suburbanites are "people" too, with their own special forms of desperation that need the gospel for their healing. In some ways, a faithful ministry of the gospel demands greater dedication, strength, and patience in the suburban setting than in any other. Nevertheless, if there is to be *any* Christian work of reconciliation in our world of today, then this accusation of the loss of creative freedom in the church must be taken with infinite seriousness, in all its variety. Individual congregations must study these charges as specified in the literature. And before reacting in anger and disbelief, they must look, in their own individual and congregational lives, for evidences of their enslavement by their location, by their own local interests, by the cultural *status quo*, and by insensitivity to the intellectual challenges of the day. Then they must seek to prove in concrete ways that Christian faith is still alive in their midst with creative power to set men free from such enslavement.

In any radical reappraisal of the church's nature and mission, the local congregation will still face a second major challenge, even if it succeeds in rediscovering and recovering Christ's creative Spirit of freedom. When this Christian community transcends its own self-interests and makes common cause with the community of mankind in all its walks of life, the question remains: How does Christian faith operate, in specific cases, to give men the vision and incentive to use social, political, and economic power and relations so as to enhance the dignity of men rather than to crush and to destroy men? And again: what specific words of truth and light can Christian faith speak to the arts and sciences so that they will be enabled to impart courage and hope to the human race, in place of the fear and despair they now breed, as science is bent to the production of atomic holocaust, and art

seems able to represent man only as a monster?

This is the question of Christian ethics, of the relation between believing and doing. It is the crucial question and the decisive challenge that faces the church in its reappraisal of its nature and mission. Only if the Christian community can resolve this question in its heart and mind will it be able to define and to fulfill its mission. Only so will the church be able to make good its claim that Jesus Christ is "the way, and the truth, and the life" for all men in all times and places. The problem of the church's cultural enslavement and the problem of the church's need of radically new forms of being are subsidiary problems, and they will be resolved only when the Christian mind achieves clarity on the ethical issue.

The problem can be approached in several different ways. For example, what is a "Christian" act? It can be answered simply that it is an act performed by a person or a group that is Christian. But does the fact that a person is a Christian make any difference in the way he conducts his activities as citizen, politician, businessman or laborer, parent or spouse? A few years ago a group of doctors in San Francisco were having a dinner at the conclusion of a social welfare project to which they had given their services. They fell to discussing why they had become involved in the project. One man finally said, "Why, I guess I was just doing my Christian duty." To which another replied quietly, "And I was just doing my Jewish duty." Could not a third have said within himself, "And I my human duty"? Furthermore, is there such a thing as "Christian art"? And does a scientist's religious faith affect his research in any way, or does science have its own autonomous ethic?

All these questions, however, indicate just one level of the problem as it applies to the Christian mission. Supposing we

grant the existence of a community of men whose behavior in all walks of life is affected in some way by the fact that they are Christians. The larger and even more difficult and more important question is this: Does the presence of this Christian community within the total body of mankind really act as leaven and as salt, giving movement and savor to the life of all men and institutions that are touched, even though they do not become "Christian"? This is the more important, indeed the crucial, question concerning the mission of the church because all the evidence presented in this study argues for a direct reversal in the importance traditionally granted to the two ministries of the church. In the whole history of the church the greater importance has been attached to the church-directed ministries for the building up of the size and strength of the church. Especial significance has been attached to the minority ministries mentioned above, so much so that the word "minister" has been generally reserved for the ordained preacher and priest. The importance of the world-directed ministry, accomplished through the Christian living of the laymen, has not been completely denied, but it has not received much attention or cultivation, and its role in the saving work of God in the church has been clouded in utter confusion and neglect. It has been tacitly understood that the only really saving, redeeming, reconciling work is that of converting and holding sinners within the church. This work has been yielded and even assigned to the professional clergy, and the laity has been disinherited as far as the vital work of the church goes. The laity have been regarded as objects rather than as agents of reconciliation.

It must be granted that the ministries designed to build up the church in size and quality are of *first* importance, but the ministry of reconciliation to the world is of *ultimate* im-

portance in the being and calling of the church. The church-directed ministries are first only in order of time because by them an organism (the body of Christ) is built up and maintained and equipped to perform a given task and mission. That mission is ultimate, and it is the clue to the meaning of the church's very being. The ultimate and sovereign reality about the church is its election, its being called into existence by God to be his servant, his agent (*diakonos*), of his work of reconciliation. God has designed the church in his calling so that the large bulk of its membership does not, cannot, live withdrawn within the sanctuary of the church but is buried like seed, like leaven, like salt, like light, in the earth of common humanity. Through them, he is working his will for mankind, bringing the world to crisis and ultimately to reconciliation. Therefore, the needs and demands for the giving of effective witness by the whole membership, in the world-directed ministry of crisis and encouragement, must be the overruling consideration in the whole life and program of the church. These needs and demands will not be met unless and until the church can resolve its fundamental ethical obscurity and uncertainty.

This book is neither the appropriate time nor place for working out such a resolution. This is a task for the whole church, bringing together all the resources of history, theology, and contemporary involvement of Christians in every level of human existence. Yet it should be made clear that what is meant by the problem of a Christian ethic is not at all the delineation of a set of Christian virtues or of a code of moral rules, or even of what is called "a Christian style of living." The problem of a Christian ethic is much more profound and comprehensive than that. It will at least (1) have to spell out the grounds and implications of the Christian claim that the creation, under God, arouses and

supports human life at the level of "love" among "persons." It will also (2) have to show that this claim becomes believable not just by its being said in words but by its being tested and proved in the doing, by the pattern of life that emerges as men tentatively and hesitantly begin to live in the light of such a "word." And (3) any adequate Christian ethic will have to make clear that, however far out into the secular world the influences of the Christian "word" may flow, the effective origin and continuing sustenance of these influences are to be found only in the inspiring and creative power of the "real presence" of such life actualized in Jesus Christ.

These general principles will have to be given flesh and blood by finding their incarnation in the concrete events and conditions of human history and contemporary life as Christians participate in it. But it may be suggested that the sense of failure that many Christians have thus far had in their search for such incarnations is traceable to the inadequacy of the theological ideas and to the shallowness of their own worship with which they came to the search.

Let us suppose, now, a congregation that successfully goes through these two stages of its reappraisal of its being and mission. Let us suppose that it recovers its creative Christian freedom and throws off the shackles of its enslavement, that it is able to spell out a vital Christian ethic. That congregation will then face a third and final challenge concerning its effectiveness for the fulfillment of its mission. The problem can be put this way: Will the present structures of the life of the congregation help or actually hinder it as it moves to enact its newly defined purpose for being? By "structures" we mean here what were previously referred to as "organizational forms" (pp. 76 f., above). We mean the buildings and all it takes to build and support them. We mean the

division of membership into clergy and laity; the existence of official boards, elders, deacons, trustees, consistories, etc.; group life in the form of women's guilds, men's clubs, couples clubs, youth groups, Sunday church school, prayer groups, study groups, etc. We mean also the "inviolate" institution of Sunday morning worship. We mean the subjection of the local congregation to the surveillance and program guidance from superior judicatories, boards, and agencies of the national denomination. And there is much more.

No one can deny that it takes vast expenditures of time, energy, and money just to keep all of this machinery going. In the average congregation there is little time or interest left over to ask where it is going, or whether it is just grinding its gears and not going anywhere. Furthermore, everyone knows that such complicated organizations have a deep instinct for self-preservation as an end in itself. So tradition — the way things have always been done — is a heavy drag on any move in a new direction. And any change is opposed by complex personal vested interests.

In the light of these characteristics of the structures of congregational life, any individual church that performs an honest and thorough reappraisal of its nature and mission will have to ask very seriously whether it will be able to perform that ultimate mission to the world as we have here defined it. Even if it wants and seeks to reject a concentration on its own congregational self-interests, it may find it to be impossible to transcend those interests because of extensive institutional and organizational commitments. Therefore, voices are now being raised demanding various kinds of reform. Some are asking for a radical restructuring of the life of existing congregations so that they can concentrate all their energies on the kind of study, group action, and social

involvement required in order to fulfill the Christian mission to the world. But any congregation that undertakes to heed these voices should understand that the required changes may be as radical as if the pope had tried to put all Luther's proposals into effect overnight for the whole of Christendom.

More radical voices (Berger, e.g.) are therefore urging us to recognize that we cannot seriously expect established churches to undergo such radical reformation. The forces weighing against it are as great now as in Luther's day. The only alternative, they tell us, is to leave the churches as they are to continue their necessary tasks of teaching the children and caring for the psychologically crippled and the aged. But those who are seriously concerned and ready to engage in Christian encounter with our culture must move out of the congregations and create new forms of Christian community and action. Many experiments along these lines have already been initiated (cf. Margaret Frakes, *Bridges to New Understanding*; Muhlenberg Press, 1960). Some have already collapsed, and no one feels that the ideal form has emerged. There is deep unrest and uncertainty in this camp, but the search goes courageously forward. And established congregations and denominations should support these exotic innovators because, like Luther, they may prove to be right. The churches should be on the alert to learn from them even now, instead of being forced to a reluctant and stultifying purification such as the Roman Catholic Church experienced at Trent.

More conservative voices, however, are suggesting that we do not have to perform any radical restructuring of the present congregation, let alone move out of it altogether. They (Marty, e.g.) believe that all that is needed is a streamlining of the present structures, some brisk rearranging of the furniture within, and a throwing open of the windows in order

to let fresh theological breezes blow in. Then the extant congregations can be poised, with their vast membership and resources, to move with power to a new engagement with the world, bringing the judgment and encouragement of the gospel in new and creative ways into all the walks of life where Christians live and work. A few congregations scattered across the land have actually begun to move in this direction, but it is too soon yet to judge with what success.

Where does the answer lie? Which voices should be heeded? Whither the way ahead? Quite frankly, no one knows. The answer will not come in any book, no matter who writes it. Nor will it probably come from God-chosen prophets such as Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin. Our world is too complex, too hard, too indifferent, even to give a hearing to such a one. The answer will come only through rigorous reappraisal and courageous following of new leadings by groups of Christians who take seriously their calling to be agents of God's reconciliation. In these groups there must be those who can awaken the consciousness of men before God in worship, those who are theologically mature in the church's faith, and those who bring with them intimate knowledge of all the ways of the world. Together, not as priest and people or as clergy and laity but as members one of another, they may be able to discern the ways in which God is even now moving ahead of his church in his mission of the reconciliation of the world. Then these Christians can pray for the courage to follow him.

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